Serena Nanda
Richard L. Warms

13TH EDITION

CULTURAL anthropology

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13th Edition

Serena Nanda

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York

Richard L. Warms

Texas State University

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Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
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Copy Editor: Gillian Dickens

Typesetter: diacriTech

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PREFACE

You hold in your hand or are reading on your screen the latest collaborative work of Serena Nanda and Rich Warms. We have been writing introductory anthropology books together now for more than a quarter century. The first edition of Serena's *Cultural Anthropology* hit the market in the late 1970s, more than 45 years ago. At that time, Serena was the only female author writing textbooks for introductory anthropology. Rich joined Serena in 1995 for the sixth edition of *Cultural Anthropology*, and we have worked together ever since.

It's hard to overstate the changes in the world and in anthropology since the early editions of our books. Many of these have been very encouraging: from the end of the Cold War to the extraordinary increases in diversity throughout society. Others have been deeply disturbing, from the decline of the middle class to the extraordinary polarization of political and social life and the erosion of human rights in many places throughout the world.

In 2018, as we wrote the 12th edition of *Cultural Anthropology*, it was clear that enormous changes were under way in America and elsewhere. In the time that has passed since then, these have only increased. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and social changes it brought; the 2020 election and events of January 6, 2021; the Russian invasion of Ukraine; and the resulting economic challenges have all led to fundamental changes in culture around the world. Now, more than ever, we need anthropological understandings to help us make sense of the world. Anthropology can help us think creatively about culture and society. Understanding the different ways that societies have been organized and ways in which other people in other places and times have made meaningful lives different from our own can give us hope for the future.

OUR APPROACH TO ANTHROPOLOGY

AND PEDOLOGICAL STYLE

We have always deeply believed in the relevance of anthropology. We have always seen anthropology as both a profoundly philosophical and extremely practical endeavor. More than any other discipline, anthropology, by examining the full range of human culture, both past and present, provides us with different ways of thinking about what it means to be human. Thinking about culture gives us new ways to solve problems. The perspectives and skills of anthropology have never been more relevant. Anthropology may not have all the answers, but in a world increasingly characterized by xenophobia, anger, fear of difference, and hostility to those who do not share our views, the information and understandings that anthropology brings may truly help us avert catastrophe.

We continue to believe deeply in the value of ethnography and the way it provides a window into other lives. We are inspired every time we return to classic writing in anthropology, some of it now more than a century old. We find enduring meaning in the work and ideas of early 20th-century anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Bronislaw Malinowski, Zora Neale Hurston, and others. Many of their ethnographic examples and theoretical perspectives remain deeply relevant. An anthropology that focuses only on current culture to the exclusion of historic ethnography is too limited to be useful in helping us understand humanity.

However, we also deeply value the ethnographic writing and analysis of the current day and past quarter century. Recent anthropology's focus on issues of power, gender, race, and history; its examination of the ways in which authority is constituted and maintained; and its analysis of structure and agency are critical to using anthropology to think about the world. We have been deeply inspired by authors such as Sherry Ortner, Veena Das, Cheryl Mattingly, Sarah Horton, Joel Robbins, Arthur Kleinman, Tom Boellstorff, Kimberlé Crenshaw, T. M. Luhrmann, and many, many others.

The goal of this, and indeed, of all our books, is to strive to create the best of both worlds: to engage students both in the anthropological tradition and in the best of contemporary anthropological analysis. We want our students and our readers to understand the dynamics of foraging society or the ways in which reciprocity works in the kula trade. We also want them to be attuned to the dynamics of identity and inequality, the relationships between economy and culture, and the importance of race, class, ethnicity, intersectionality, and gender. Knowledge of the anthropological tradition informs our understanding of contemporary societies and vice versa.

Some critical features and perspectives of this edition of *Cultural Anthropology* are as follows:

- Emphasizing ethnography: Students need to learn about the ways people have lived in other cultures. In a world where cell phones are everywhere and you’re never too far away from a fast-food restaurant, it’s important to realize that cultural differences still resonate deeply for most people. Ethnography helps students understand that our current society is not the only way of living or the result of inevitable natural laws. Detailed descriptions of both current and historic cultures are found in every chapter of the book.

- Inequality, power, and agency: Cultures are characterized by both cooperation and competition. Hierarchy and resistance to it are found in most societies. The dynamics of power and human agency is emphasized in chapters on politics, stratification, race and ethnicity, and gender, as well as many additional places throughout the text. The ways in which power is maintained and resisted are explored throughout the book.

- The role and importance of gender: Gender has always been a central concern of the book, and Serena Nanda is a well-known authority on it. Gender has its own chapter but is also emphasized in numerous other places throughout the work.

- Understanding race and analyzing its social and political roots: The 13th edition includes a full chapter on race and ethnicity. It is vital for students to understand that race and ethnicity are social and historical constructs rather than simply an expression of biology. Both are explored in the race and ethnicity chapter and in many other places throughout the book.
- The importance of history, imperialism, and colonialism: A full chapter places the world system in historical context and explores colonialism and resistance to it.
- The relevance of anthropology: Students want to know how they can use anthropology in their daily lives and what sorts of work anthropologists do. Two features—Anthropology Makes a Difference and The Global and the Local—provide example-driven answers to these questions.

CHANGES IN THE 13TH EDITION

The extraordinary developments of the past 5 years have led us to rethink the organization of the book and many of the examples and analyses that we use. There are many hundred small changes and more than 300 new references. Every chapter has been revised and all statistics, graphs, and charts updated. However, readers will also notice several large changes. The biggest of these is the introduction of a new chapter on race and ethnicity. This chapter adds a great deal of new material and analysis to the information found in the stratification chapter in earlier editions.

A second change is that in previous editions, all ethnographies appeared as boxed features titled “Ethnography.” In the new edition, some ethnographies have been moved into the main flow of the text (particularly in Chapter 5, “Making a Living”); others continue to appear as “Ethnography.”

One of the critical ways in which we have responded to changes in world culture and in anthropology is through the features in each chapter. Some that are new to this edition include gestures and emoticons in Chapter 4; culinary thrill seekers (about humans and flavor), as well as climate change and food choice, both in Chapter 5; the gig economy in Chapter 8; inequality, race, and COVID-19 in Chapter 9; working with female heroin addicts in Chapter 11; and designing a picture book for indigenous kids in Chapter 14.

Issues around medical care and public health play an increasingly important role in anthropology and are an area of student interest. Although we do not have a chapter on medical anthropology, we incorporate it in many places throughout the book. You’ll find it particularly in our discussion of Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* in Chapter 3; pandemics and emergencies in Chapter 3; anthropology and nutrition in Chapter 5; race, health, and the environment and COVID-19 in Chapter 9; elder care in Chapter 10; working with heroin addicts in Chapter 11; vaccine refusal in Chapter 12; and health, colonialism, and history in Chapter 14 and in several places in our final chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Producing a book like this involves many people, and we'd like to thank some of them individually. Of course, our families come first. We couldn't do any of this without their continued support and forbearance. After them comes our editorial team at SAGE, including particularly our editors Jeff Lesser Tiara Beatty, and Megan O'Heffernan. And of course our colleagues at Texas State University and elsewhere. Feedback from advice from our students has been critical, and we'd like to thank D'Artagnan Elliott, Manar Naser, and Jake Wildenstein for their significant contributions to this project. We are also grateful for the feedback we have received from our reviewers, including David Buchman, Hanover College; Heather O'Leary, University of South Florida; Lily Malekfar, The City Colleges of Toronto; Jennifer Haynes-Clark, Rogue Community College; Yvonne Vissing, Rivier University; and Angela Montague, Utah State University.

Serena and Rich are deeply grateful for our long careers in anthropology. Between us, we've studied, taught, and written about gender, law, Indian culture, West African culture, colonialism, economics, inequality, religion, history, ecology, anthropological theory, museums, tourism, peace and violence, and many other topics. Both of us fell in love with anthropology as young undergraduates, a romance that continues today. Serena retired in the mid-2000s and, sadly, passed away in late 2022. Rich still teaches at Texas State University and looks forward, every year, to bringing ANTH 1312, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, to a new group of students. We wrote this book with love and passion for our discipline, with respect and deep gratitude for the professors and students who have used past editions of our books, and those who will use this one. We hope this is apparent in every chapter. As always, Rich is glad to hear from any of our readers. Feel free to contact him at r.warms@txstate.edu.

PART I INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1 ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMAN DIVERSITY

Anthropologists study cultural practices all over the world in their attempt to understand the similarities and differences among human groups. Here, in Fukuoka, Japan, men celebrate the Gion Yamakasa festival. The festival commemorates an important event in the 13th century when a priest ended an epidemic of plague by scattering water while sitting on a float carried by townspeople. Now, each July, teams of men carrying floats that can weigh several tons race through the city streets following the priest’s route.

Sankei/Sankei via Getty Images

Learning Objectives

1.1 Define anthropology and explain how it differs from other academic disciplines.

1.2 Explain ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and the ways anthropology has evolved under changing working conditions.

1.3 Discuss some of the key reasons for studying anthropology.

1.4 Assess the role of peace and violence in human societies.

As long as human beings have existed, they have lived in groups and have had to answer certain critical questions. They have had to figure out how to live with one another; how to feed, clothe, and house themselves; how to determine rights and responsibilities; how to lend meaning to their lives; and how to interact with those who live differently. Cultures are human responses to these basic questions. The goal of cultural **anthropology**, or the comparative study of human societies and cultures, is to describe, analyze, and explain different cultures. Anthropologists show how groups have adapted to their natural and social environments and how they have given significance to their lives. Anthropologists often focus on current and historical interactions among different cultural groups and patterns of power and inequality both within and among cultures.

In this chapter, we introduce some of the basic ideas of anthropology. We first describe the way the field is divided into major subdisciplines. We discuss ideas that are fundamental to the field, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, and we consider the ways in which anthropology has been affected by new global patterns of technology, commerce, and power. Finally, we turn to an examination of why anthropology is a critical discipline for humanity today. Along the way, we explore anthropology and medicine, learn a bit about a famous ethnic group, and consider the relationships between anthropologists and those they work with.

Anthropologists attempt to comprehend the entire human experience. We study our species from its ancestral beginnings several million years ago up to the present. We study human beings as they live in every corner of the earth, in all kinds of physical, political, and social environments. We reach beyond humans to understand primates, those animals most closely related to us. We reach into the future, contemplating how we might communicate with extraterrestrial intelligence (Traphagan, 2014) or live on space stations (Oman-Reagan, 2016). This interest in humankind and our closest relations throughout time and in all parts of the world distinguishes anthropology as a scientific and humanistic discipline.

In other academic disciplines, human behavior is usually studied primarily from the point of view of Western society. Scholars in these disciplines often consider the behavior of people in the modern industrial nations of Europe and North America to be representative of all humanity. Anthropologists, on the other hand, believe that we can only understand who we are as human beings—our potentials and our perils—through the study of humanity in its total variety. In an era when people from different cultures are increasingly in contact with one another and most people in the world live in multicultural and multiethnic nations, this anthropological perspective is vital.

Human beings everywhere consider their own behavior not only right but also natural. Our ideas about economics, religion, morality, and other areas of social life seem logical and inevitable to us, but others have found different answers. For example, should you give your infant bottled formula or breastfeed not only your own child but, like the Efe of The Democratic Republic of the Congo, those of your friends and neighbors as well (N. R. Peacock, 1991, p. 352)? How many genders are there? Does tradition say two, as many Americans believe, or five, as many Bugis (members of a large ethnic group in Indonesia) believe (Idrus, 2016)? Is it right that emotional love should precede sexual relations? Or should sexual relations precede love, as is normal for the Mangaian of the Pacific (D. Marshall, 1971)? What should we have for lunch: hamburgers and fries or termites, grasshoppers, and hot maguey worms, all of which are commonly eaten in certain regions of Mexico (Bates, 1967, pp. 58–59)? Should we bring our baby into a shop or restaurant with us or leave them to snooze in a stroller outside as is common in Denmark (Lodish, 2014, Figure 1.1). In anthropology, concepts of human nature and theories of human behavior are based on studies of a wide variety of human groups. We often find that other people's goals, values, views of reality, and environmental adaptations are very different from our own.

ESPRESSO HOUSE
15
ØNNE
Køb
B.T.
...så er du med
Premier
Nestlé
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uden A

Figure 1.1 In Denmark, it is common for shopping or dining parents to leave their babies outside.

STOCKFOLIO®/Alamy Stock Photo

Anthropologists bring a holistic approach to understanding and explaining. To say anthropology is **holistic** means that it combines the study of human biology, history, language, and the learned and shared patterns of human behavior and thought we call culture in order to analyze human groups. Holism separates anthropology from other academic disciplines, which generally focus on one factor—biology, psychology, physiology, or society—to explain human behavior. Anthropology seeks to understand human beings as organisms who adapt to their environments through a complex interaction of biology and culture.

Because anthropologists take a holistic approach, they are interested in the total range of human activity. Most anthropologists specialize in a single field and a single problem, but together they study the small dramas of daily living as well as spectacular social events. They study the ways in which mothers hold their babies or sons address their fathers. They want to know not only how a group gets its food but also the rules for eating it. Anthropologists are interested in how human societies think about time and space, as well as how they see colors and name them. They are interested in health and illness and the significance of physical variation. Anthropologists are interested in social rules and practices concerning sex and marriage. They are interested in folklore and fairy tales, political speeches, and everyday conversation. For anthropologists, great ceremonies like the coronation of a ruler and daily rituals like the way one greets a friend are both worth investigating.

THE FIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

To cover such a broad range of interests, anthropology is divided into several specialized subdisciplines. The major divisions of anthropology are biological (sometimes called physical) anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and applied anthropology. Although professional anthropologists generally have training in all the subdisciplines, they usually identify with only one of them.

Biological or Physical Anthropology

People live in a broad range of ecological and social conditions. Our ability to survive and prosper in many different circumstances is based on the enormous flexibility of cultural behavior. The capacity for culture, however, is grounded in our biological history and physical makeup. Human adaptation is thus biocultural; that is, it involves both biological and cultural dimensions. Therefore, to understand fully what it is to be human, we need a sense of how the biological aspects of this adaptation came about and how they influence human cultural behavior.

Biological (or physical) anthropology is the study of humankind from a biological perspective. It focuses primarily on those aspects of humanity that are genetically inherited. Biological anthropology includes numerous subfields, such as skeletal analysis, or osteology; the study of human nutrition; demography, or the statistical study of human populations; epidemiology, or the study of patterns of disease; and primatology.

Human evolution and the biological processes involved in human adaptation are key areas of study for biological anthropologists. Paleoanthropologists search for the origins of humanity. They use both the fossil record and sophisticated forms of genetic analysis to trace the history of human evolution. Their research has demonstrated that a great diversity of fossil species bear some similarity to modern humans.

Another subspecialty of biological anthropology, called human variation, is concerned with physiological differences among humans. Anthropologists who study human variation map physiological differences among modern human groups and attempt to explain the sources of this diversity.

Because the human species evolved through a complex feedback system involving both biological and cultural factors, biological anthropologists are also interested in the origins and evolution of culture. For example, in his 2009 book *Catching Fire*, the biological anthropologist Richard Wrangham argued that an aspect of culture—the ability to control fire and use it to cook food—led to dramatic biological and social changes in human ancestors. Cooked food is more digestible than raw, and this resulted in changes in human anatomy, including far shorter digestive tracks than our closest primate relatives. Cooking food also required changes in social organization that led to much greater cooperation between males and females than is found among nonhuman primates. Wrangham thus argued that human evolution was both a biological and a cultural process.

Our unique evolutionary history resulted in the development of a biological structure—the human brain—capable of inventing, learning, and using cultural adaptations. Cultural adaptation, in turn, has freed humans from the slow process of biological evolution: Populations can invent new ways of dealing with problems almost immediately or adopt solutions from other societies. The study of the complex relationship between biological and cultural evolution links biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and archaeology.

In addition to studying living human groups, biological anthropologists study living nonhuman primates, members of the order that includes monkeys, apes, and humans. Primates are studied for the clues that their chemistry, physiology, morphology (physical structure), and behavior provide about our own species. At one time, primates were studied mainly in the artificial settings of laboratories and zoos, but now much of the work of biological anthropologists involves studying these animals in the wild. Jane Goodall and Biruté Mary Galdikas

(Figure 1.2) are two well-known anthropologists who study primates in the wild. Goodall works with chimpanzees in Tanzania, Galdikas with orangutans in Indonesia. Both are widely recognized for their conservation efforts.

Figure 1.2 Understanding primate behavior is part of biological anthropology. Here, Biruté Mary Galdikas, a professor at Simon Frasier University and one of the founders of Orangutan Foundation International, films orangutans in Indonesia.

SUZANNE PLUNKETT/AFP via Getty Images

Linguistic Anthropology

Language is the primary means by which people communicate with one another. Although most creatures communicate, human speech is more complex, creative, and used more extensively than the communication systems of other animals. Language is an essential part of what it means to be human and a basic part of all cultures. **Linguistic anthropology** is concerned with understanding language and its relation to culture.

Language is an amazing thing that we take for granted. When we speak, we use our bodies—our lungs, vocal cords, mouth, tongue, and lips—to produce noise of varying tone and pitch. And, somehow, when we and others do this together, we are able to communicate with one another, but only if we speak the same language. Linguistic anthropologists want to understand the variation among languages, how language is structured, how it is learned, and how it is used.

Language is a complex symbolic system that people use to communicate and to transmit culture. Thus, language provides critical clues for understanding culture. For example, people generally talk about the people, places, and objects that are important to them. Therefore, the vocabularies of spoken language may give us clues to important aspects of culture. For example, it is interesting that Spanish has a word for hanging out and talking at a meal after all the food is gone (*sobremesa*), Russian has a word for a person who asks too many questions (*pochemuchka*), and Inuit has a word for the feeling of anticipation you have waiting for someone to show up at your house (*iktsuarpok*). Knowing the words that people use for things might help us to glimpse how they understand the world.

Language involves much more than words. When we speak, we perform. If we tell a story, we don't simply recite the words. We emphasize some things. We add inflection that can turn a serious phrase comic or a comic phrase serious. We give our own special tilt to a story, even if we are just reading a book out loud. Linguistic anthropologists are interested in how people perform language— how their actions and expressions change and modify the meanings of their words.

All languages change. Historical linguists work to discover how languages have changed and their relationships to one another. Understanding linguistic change and the connections between languages helps us to work out the past of the people who speak them. Knowing, for example, the relationships among various Native American languages gives us insight into the histories and migrations of their speakers. For example, the Navajo, the Hopi, and the Zuni are Native American groups who live fairly close to one another in Arizona and New Mexico. However, the Navajo speak an Athabascan language that ties them historically to groups in Canada and Alaska, whereas the Hopi speak a Uto-Aztecan language, linking them historically with groups in Mexico. The Zuni speak a language that cannot easily be classified into a larger family.

The technological changes of the past two decades have opened a new world of communications. The widespread use of cell phones, e-mail, texting, emojis, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, and Reddit creates entirely new ways of communicating, changing both the occasions on which people communicate and the language they use. For example, 20 years ago, people who lived at a great distance from each other communicated relatively rarely. The mail was often slow, and phone calls were expensive. Now, such people may communicate many times daily, texting, speaking on the phone, and messaging through websites. Cell phones in particular have become extremely important in poorer nations. For example, in 1998, there were no cell phones in Botswana. But by 2006, there were more than 800,000, enough for half the total population and more than six times the number of landlines (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, n.d.). By 2008, virtually every citizen had a cell phone (Aker & Mbiti, 2010), and by 2019, there were 1.7 cellular subscriptions for every person in Botswana. In 2019, across sub-Saharan Africa, there were 477 million unique mobile phone subscribers, a number expected to rise to 1 billion by 2024 (GSMA, 2020, p. 3). Cell phone usage is explored in more detail in the section on ethnography in Chapter 5. Studying these changes in communication is an exciting new challenge for linguistic anthropologists.

Understanding language is a critical task for people interested in developing new technology. We live in a world where computers talk to us and listen to us. We will only be able to build machines that use language effectively if we understand how humans structure and use language.

Archaeology

Archaeology is the study of past cultures through their material remains. Archaeologists add a historical dimension to our understanding of cultures and how they change.

Many archaeologists study prehistoric societies—those for which no written records have been found or no writing systems have been deciphered (Figure 1.3). However, even when an extensive written record is available, as in the case of ancient Greece or colonial America, archaeology can help increase our understanding of the cultures and ways of life.

Figure 1.3 Stephanie Schulz, Canto Photo Texas State University

Archaeologists do not observe human behavior and culture directly but rather reconstruct them from material remains or artifacts. An artifact is any object that human beings have made, used, or altered. Artifacts include pottery, tools, garbage, and whatever else a society has left behind.

In the popular media, archaeology is mainly identified with spectacular discoveries of artifacts from prehistoric and ancient cultures, such as the tomb of the Egyptian king Tutankhamun. As a result, people often think of archaeologists primarily as collectors. But contemporary archaeologists are much more interested in understanding and explaining their finds in terms of what those objects say about the behavior that produced them than in creating collections. Their principal task is to infer the nature of past cultures based on the patterns of the artifacts left behind. Archaeologists work like detectives, slowly sifting and interpreting evidence. The context in which things are found, the location of an archaeological site, and the precise position of an artifact within that site are critical to interpretation. These considerations are often more important than the artifact itself.

There are many different specialties within archaeology. Urban archaeology is a good example of a specialization. Urban archaeologists delve into the recent and distant past of current-day cities. In doing so, they uncover knowledge of the people often left out of the history books, making our understanding of the past far richer than it was. For example, Elizabeth Scott’s (2001) work at Nina Plantation in Louisiana adds to our understanding of the lives of slaves and free laborers from the 1820s to the 1890s. Joseph Bagley’s excavation of a Boston outhouse belonging to a Puritan woman from the late 1600s unearthed a bowling ball and frilly lace … interesting because both were illegal at the time. Bagley’s work shows that people’s private behavior could be quite different from what was recorded in the official records (Bagley, 2016).

Another important archeology subfield is cultural resource management (CRM). Archaeologists working in CRM are concerned with the protection and management of archaeological, archival, and architectural resources. They are often employed by federal, state, and local agencies to develop and implement plans for the protection and management of such cultural resources. Before construction on buildings, roadways, and public works begins, CRM archaeologists assess the area to determine if there are important archaeological remains. Sometimes they make critical finds. For example, in 1991, the U.S. government was about to build a new building on Broadway in New York City. Archaeologists evaluating the site discovered the remains of more than 400 people of African descent. Construction plans were modified, and today, the site is African Burial Grounds National Monument.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is the study of human society and culture.

Cultural anthropologists focus on current-day culture and the cultures, as well as cultures of the recent past. Anthropologists define **society** as a group of people persisting through time and the social relationships among these people—their statuses and roles. **Culture** is the major way in which human beings adapt to their environments and give meaning to their lives. It includes human behavior and ideas that are learned rather than genetically transmitted, as well as the material objects a group of people produces. We describe culture more fully in Chapter 3.

Cultural anthropologists attempt to understand culture both as a universal human phenomenon and as a characteristic of a group of people. They may use many different research strategies to search for general principles that underlie all cultures or examine the dynamics of specific cultures. They may explore the ways in which members of different societies produce and acquire their food, how they raise children and pass on their beliefs and practices, and how they understand the world and their place in it. They may examine how members of different cultures interact with and change one another. Anthropologists are often particularly interested in the effects of differences of power both among cultures and within individual cultures.

Research in cultural anthropology is almost always based on **participant observation**, long-term fieldwork that involves gathering data by observing and participating in people’s lives. Anthropologists are sometimes portrayed on TV and movies as studying groups that are wholly unaffected by the modern world and uncontaminated by its practices. Sometimes such groups are described as “stone-age” or “primitive.” Whether presented as a documentary or a story, this is fiction. For better or for worse, such groups haven’t existed for a long time. Members of industrialized cultures had reached virtually every group of people in the world by the time of World War I. Today, there are about 100 ethnic groups that choose to reject contact with outsiders. Of these, most live in the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon (Survival International, 2017). However, here, uncontacted is a relative term. These groups are neither unknown nor undiscovered. In many cases, they have contact with neighboring tribes; in other cases, members have visited the outside world. They have guns, metal tools, and other elements of modern technology.

One of the most compelling facts of life in the 21st century is that although some groups of people are surely more isolated than others, virtually all groups are in contact with one another. Modern transportation and electronic communication have made specific locales less important. Societies are increasingly global. Today, even in relatively isolated locations, anthropologists are apt to find that the people they work with are well aware of events in the United States and the policies of governments around the world. They wear T-shirts with the names of U.S. cities or professional sports teams and drink Coca-Cola. They get their news from the radio, television, and the Internet. Even in very remote locations, it is common to meet people who have traveled widely and who have relatives living in the United States or in Western Europe.

Ethnography and ethnology are two important aspects of cultural anthropology. **Ethnography** is the description of society or culture. Ethnography refers to both the process of qualitative, fieldwork-based research and the written results of that research. An ethnographer attempts to describe an entire society or a specific set of cultural institutions or practices. An ethnography may be either emic or etic, or it may be a combination of the two. An **emic** ethnography attempts to capture what ideas and practices mean to members of a culture. It attempts to give readers a sense of what it feels like to be a member of the culture it describes. An **etic** ethnography describes and analyzes culture according to principles and theories drawn from Western scientific traditions such as ecology, economy, or psychology. Emics and etics will be more fully described in Chapter 2. **Ethnology** is the attempt to find general principles or laws that govern culture, to compare and contrast practices in different cultures to find regularities.

Cultural anthropology is a complex field with many different subfields. One index of this complexity is presented by the more than 50 different sections and interest groups of the American Anthropological Association; most of these are concerned with cultural anthropology. Some examples include political and legal anthropology, which is concerned with issues of nationalism, citizenship, the state, colonialism, and globalism; humanistic anthropology, which is focused on the personal, ethical, and political choices facing humans; and visual anthropology, which is the study of visual representation and the media.

Cultural anthropologists are often particularly interested in documenting and understanding the ways in which cultures change (Figure 1.4). They examine the roles that power and coercion play in change as well as humans' ability to invent new social forms and modify old ones. Studies of culture change are important because rapid shifts in society, economy, and technology are basic characteristics of the contemporary world. Understanding the dynamics of change is critical for individuals, governments, and corporations. One goal of cultural anthropology is to be able to contribute productively to public debate about the promotion of and reaction to change.

Figure 1.4 Cultural anthropologists describe and analyze current-day culture. Many current studies focus on culture change the connections among societies. Here, a person wearing a Pikachu mascot outfit, which is from the Japanese video game Pokemon, stands on a street in London, England.

iStockphoto.com/triloks

Applied Anthropology

Much of anthropology is concerned with basic research—that is, asking the big questions about the origins of our species, the development of culture and civilization, and the functions of human social institutions. **Applied anthropology** is the use of anthropology in both public and private sectors to solve real-world problems.

Applied anthropologists are trained in one of the four subdisciplines we have already mentioned. Sometimes referred to as practicing anthropologists, they work with governments, corporations, and other organizations to use anthropological research techniques to solve social, political, and economic problems. In this book, we highlight some of the work of applied anthropologists. Each chapter includes a feature titled “Anthropology Makes a Difference.” There, you will read about some of the ways anthropologists are involved in the practical worlds of business, defense, medicine, government, public policy, climate change, sustainable development, refugees, immigration, law enforcement, and communication.

Specialists in each of the subfields of anthropology make contributions to applied work. For example, in cultural anthropology, experts in the anthropology of agriculture use their knowledge to help people with reforestation, water management, and agricultural productivity. Such experts have been instrumental to the work of many organizations that promote the welfare of tribal and indigenous peoples throughout the world. Examples of these organizations include Cultural Survival, founded by anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis; the Center for World Indigenous Studies; and Survival International. Cultural anthropologists who study legal and criminal justice systems address problems such as drug abuse or racial and ethnic conflict. They have often promoted alternative forms of conflict resolution, such as mediation techniques that grew out of anthropological studies of non-Western societies. Anthropologists working in West Africa provided key information that helped focus the medical response to the Ebola crisis in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in 2014 (American Anthropological Association, 2014). Psychological and educational anthropologists contribute to the more effective development and implementation of educational and mental health policies, and medical anthropologists apply their cross-cultural knowledge to improve health care, sanitation, diet, and disease control in a variety of cultural contexts. Some anthropologists work closely with government agencies providing relief and educational resources to at-risk communities. And many anthropologists work in the business world studying corporate culture, user experience, design, entrepreneurship, and other facets of work. More than two dozen anthropologists work for the technology consulting firm Sapient. Anthropologists can also be found working at Microsoft, Intel, Kodak, Whirlpool, AT&T, Hallmark, General Motors, and many other large corporations. They have been instrumental in developing many consumer products. For example, anthropologists helped Procter & Gamble develop the Swiffer floor mop and helped Adobe design Photoshop (Coleman, 2015; Flavelle, 2010; Pearson, 2015).

Archaeology has numerous applications. Establishing an archaeological record has often enabled native peoples to regain access to land and resources that historically belonged to them. Work in archaeology is essential to understanding the history of groups that left little record. Excavations such as the one done at the African Burial Ground in New York City (Harrington, 1993) give us insight into the living conditions of groups not well represented in the written record—in this case, enslaved and free Africans living in Manhattan in the 17th and 18th centuries. Such knowledge is frequently fundamental to cultural identity. Beyond this, archaeology has sometimes produced technical applications relevant to the current world. For example, in Israel’s Negev Desert, in Peru, and in other locations, archaeological studies of ancient peoples yielded information about irrigation design and raised-field systems that allowed modern people to make more effective use of the environment and increase agricultural yields (Downum & Price, 1999).

In biological anthropology, forensic anthropologists use their knowledge of human skeletal biology to discover information about the victims of crimes, thus aiding in law enforcement and judicial proceedings. Other biological anthropologists focus on anthropometry, the measurement of human beings, and provide critical information to designers who make everything from chairs to spacecraft.

Although there are indeed many careers in anthropology, it is our conviction that putting anthropology to work consists of more than just people earning a living with the skills they gained through training in anthropology. Perhaps the most important aspect of anthropology is the way an anthropological perspective demands that we open our eyes and experience the world in new ways. In a sense, anthropology is like teaching fish the meaning of water. How could a fish understand water? Water is all a fish knows, and it knows it so well it cannot distinguish it from the nature of life and reality itself. Similarly, all humans live in cultures, and our experiences are normally structured by our cultures. We often mistake the realities and truths of our culture for reality and truth itself, thinking that the ways we understand and do things are the only appropriate ways of understanding and doing.

The fish only understands the meaning of water when it’s removed from the water (usually with fatal consequences). If anthropology is not exactly about removing people from their culture, it is, in a sense, the conscious attempt to allow people to see beyond the bounds of their culture. Through learning about other cultures, we become increasingly aware of differences in the ways that people understand the world around them and of the many different social dynamics that underlie cultures. This helps us see the underpinnings of our own culture and encourages us to think creatively about our lives and about the social and political issues that surround us.

Applying anthropology isn’t just getting paid to use your anthropological training. All of us do applied anthropology when we bring anthropological understandings and insight to bear on problems of inequality, education, war, violence, and peace. We don’t apply anthropology only when we write a report. We apply anthropology when we go to the voting booth and the grocery store, when we discuss issues with our friends, and, if we’re religious, when we pray. Anthropology provides no simple answers. There is no correct anthropological way to vote, shop, or pray. However, anthropology does inform our decisions about these things. Our attempt to understand other cultures and lets us look on our own with new eyes.

As noted previously, in the “Anthropology Makes a Difference” boxes featured in each chapter of this book, you’ll find interesting ways that people have made careers in anthropology and used it to help others. However, you’ll also find examples of the ways in which anthropology contributes to our understanding of the world. Ultimately, our lives are more about how we exemplify the meanings and values that we hold than about how we make our living. For some, anthropology is a career, but even if you never make a dime from your study of anthropology, it will inform, enrich, and perhaps complicate your life.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Medical Anthropology: Disease, Illness, and Syndemics

Medical anthropology draws upon social, cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology to help people better understand health and well-being. It is concerned with the experience of disease as well as its distribution, prevention, and treatment.

Medical anthropologists adapt the holistic and ethnographic approaches of anthropology to the study of health and disease in diverse societies. Modern biomedicine tends to regard diseases as universal entities. However, medical anthropologists have found that disease and medicine never exist independently of particular cultural and historical contexts. Health and sickness are not just biological notions but fundamentally sociocultural and political-economic concepts. This is captured by making the distinction between disease, which refers to the biological condition of the body, and illness, which refers to the culturally shaped ways in which people experience sickness (Kleinman, 1981; Rodlach, 2006). Disease and illness in any society are influenced by issues such as subsistence systems, inequality, and the way the sick are cared for.

Anthropologists and, increasingly, medical professionals often look at disease through the study of syndemics. Syndemics occur when multiple diseases and social, economic, environmental, and political factors interact. The syndemics model focuses on understanding these interconnections and finding ways to attack not only the biology of disease but also the contextual conditions that help cause it. Rather than only focusing on individuals and their symptoms, syndemics also explores how other aspects of people’s lives lead to the development and perpetuation of illness. Early work in syndemics by anthropologist Merrill Singer examined HIV/AIDS in Hartford, Connecticut. Singer showed that it was important for public health officials to understand that the problem was not simply the HIV virus but rather a combination of substance abuse, violence, and HIV/AIDS, a condition that became known as the SAVA syndemic (Singer et al., 2017). Singer’s work in Hartford has been expanded to include communities around the world (Gilbert et al., 2015).

The study of syndemics shows numerous patterns of disease in particular social, economic, and environmental contexts. In addition to SAVA, there is VIDDA: violence, immigration, depression, type 2 diabetes, and abuse among female Mexican immigrants to the United States (Mendenhall, 2012); the chronic kidney disease and tuberculosis syndemic (Romanowski et al., 2016); the tuberculosis-diabetes syndemic (Antonio-Arques et al., 2021); the obesity, undernutrition, and climate change syndemic (Swinburn et al., 2019); and the hepatitis and mental health syndemic (Clementi et al., 2020).

Lauren Slubowski Keenan-Devlin (2014) explored the syndemic relationship between obesity, stress, poverty, and insecure living conditions among Black youth in Chicago. She found that poor schools, inadequate law enforcement, lack of employment, and financial insecurity had powerful effects on people's stress levels and waist circumferences. These effects could be tracked by measuring study participants' body mass indices and levels of cortisol, a hormone released in response to stress. High cortisol levels increase risk for depression and mental illness and lower life expectancy. Keenan-Devlin found that among youth in the South Austin neighborhood of Chicago, psychological stress, obesity, and poor living conditions are linked to metabolic and cardiovascular stresses that result in current obesity and also increase the likelihood that these individuals will suffer chronic health problems throughout their lives. Thus, these conditions affect not only the youth in the study but future generations as well.

Medical care and the provision of information about diet can play strong roles in reducing both stress and obesity among South Austin youth. However, Keenan-Devlin argued that neither of these efforts is sufficient. Breaking the multigenerational chain of stress, obesity, and, frequently, depression will require attention to stable housing, schools, and socioemotional support services that create belonging and interconnectedness.

As the example of the children in South Austin shows, it is often important to think about the connections between health and the degree to which people in different societies have access to resources such as food and water, as well as the goods and social positions their society values (Baer et al., 1997). Medical anthropologist and psychiatrist Arthur Kleinman (1995) noted that the body connects individual and group experience. Trauma caused by violence and depression caused by chronic pain are best understood as personal experiences of broader social concerns rather than simply as individual medical problems. The implication is that medical ills are closely related to social problems. Effectively treating the first sometimes requires addressing the second.

Perhaps nothing has demonstrated the connections between culture, society, and health more than the COVID-19 pandemic. In the spring and summer of 2020, as the disease swept through the United States, people’s vulnerability to it was determined in part by their wealth and the jobs they held. Wealthier people were more able to social distance, work from home, and protect themselves. Additionally, they tended to have fewer comorbidities such as diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Reeves & Rothwell, 2020). Perry et al. (2021) showed that the pandemic wreaked havoc on vulnerable groups. They found that Black adults were three times more likely than whites to report pandemic-related food insecurity or unemployment. Those without high school degrees were four times more likely to report such hardships than those who had completed college.

The social effects of COVID-19 were further compounded by cultural and political factors. Republicans and right-wing media sources tended to minimize the severity of the disease or deny it altogether. This led to a linkage between individual behavior and political-cultural identity. Mask wearing and social distancing became public performances of cultural identity. As vaccines became available in 2021, the cultural and political aspects of the disease became increasingly evident. Although the vaccines were developed under a Republican president and some Republican officials urged people to get them, others and many right-wing media sources disparaged the vaccine and told people to refuse it. As of mid-September 2021, almost 53% of people in counties that voted for Biden in 2020 were fully vaccinated, but only 40% of those in counties that voted for Trump were. As the delta variant swept the United States in late summer and fall of 2021, COVID-19 had a far greater effect in U.S. counties that voted for Trump than it did on those that voted for Biden (Bump, 2021). Between June 30 and September 25, 2021, deaths from COVID-19 were more than five times higher in the reddest counties than they were in the bluest (Jones, 2022). This isn’t surprising given that unvaccinated people have died at about 11 times the rate of the vaccinated and that state vaccination rates have been closely tied to political affiliation. As of mid-September 2021, undervaccination in red states allowed almost 12,000 preventable deaths (Pierson et al., 2021).

The work of medical anthropologists emphasizes the complex relationship of biology and culture and the ways in which cultural, political, and economic contexts shape health, sickness, and medical practice. As Keenan-Devlin (2014, pp. 146–147) noted, “Anthropology is uniquely suited to support community-based effort of transformation” and, because of its ability to use different research methodologies, speak across different professions, and create intimacy and trust with community members, “has a profound role to play” in improving health outcomes.

SOME CRITICAL ISSUES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

A major contribution of anthropology is to demonstrate the importance and variability of culture in human societies. The remainder of this book analyzes and describes various human societies and examines their differences and similarities in detail. However, there are several issues to consider before we begin this investigation. These include the nature of ethnocentrism, the meaning and importance of cultural relativism in anthropology, and how global flows of power, products, information, and people impact our cultures and our lives. These are issues that cultural anthropologists must always address, regardless of their subject of study or their perspective.

Ethnocentrism

Imagine a deaf person raised in a culture where music and dance don’t exist. Imagine they come across a group of people with fiddles and drums, jumping around every which way. The deaf person might think the people jumping about were crazy. They cannot hear the music, so they don’t see that the others are dancing (Myerhoff, 1978). Similarly, a person who does not hear the music of another culture cannot make sense of its dance. In other words, if we don’t understand the patterns and rules of other cultures, then the actions of other people may seem incomprehensible. One of the most important contributions of anthropology is its ability to open our ears to the music and meaning in other cultures. It challenges and corrects our ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism is the idea that one’s own culture is superior to any other. It is the idea that other cultures should be measured by the degree to which they live up to our cultural standards. We are ethnocentric when we view other cultures through the narrow lens of our own culture or social position.

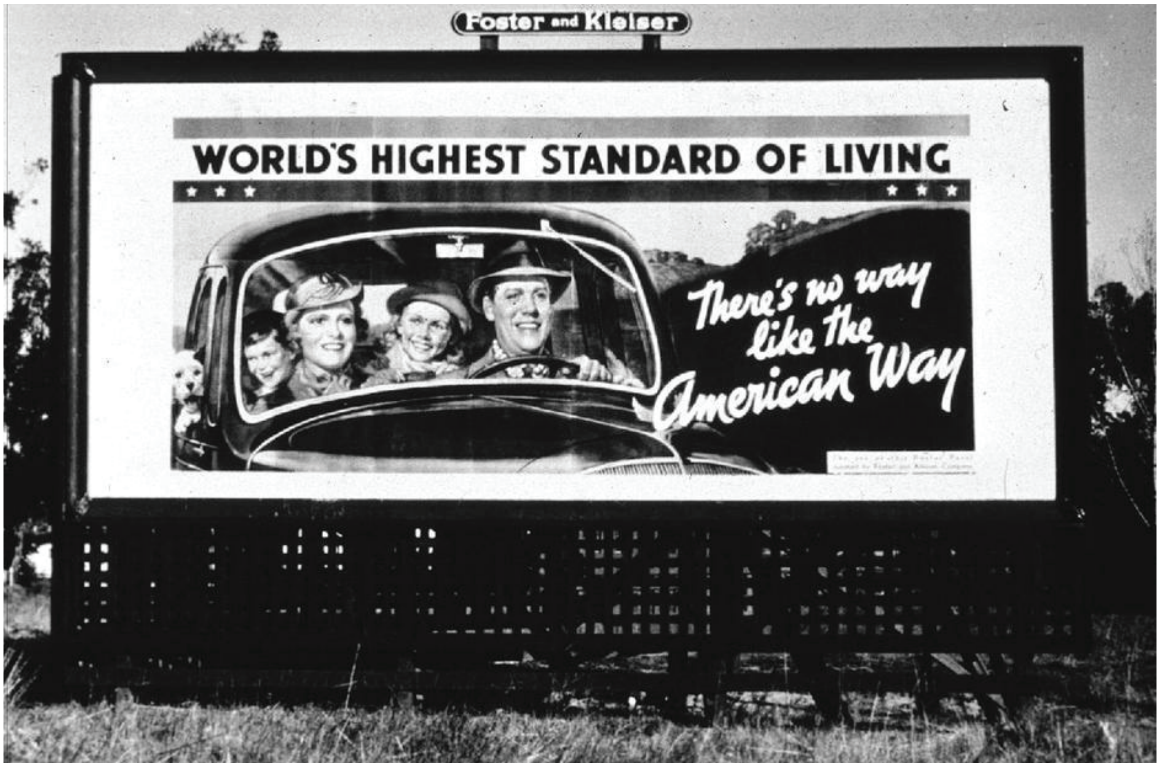

Foster and Kleiser
WORLD'S HIGHEST STANDARD OF LIVING
There's no way like the American Way

Figure 1.5 Ethnocentrism is the notion that one’s own culture is superior to any other. It is illustrated by this billboard showing a famous advertising campaign from the 1930s.

Dorothea Lange/Library of Congress/Getty Images

The American tourist who, when presented with a handful of Mexican pesos, asks, “How much is this in real money?” is being ethnocentric—but there is nothing uniquely American about ethnocentrism. People all over the world tend to see things from their own culturally patterned point of view—through their own cultural filters. They tend to value what they have been taught to value and to see the meaning of life in terms of their own culturally defined purposes. For example, people in the New Guinea Highlands understood the world of conscious beings to be composed of themselves, their allies, their enemies, and spirits, including ancestors, gods, and other figures. When they first encountered European outsiders in the 1930s, they rapidly classified them as spirits and believed that the dark-skinned carriers who accompanied them were their dead relatives. They quickly realized their mistake, but initially, this was the only way that they could make sense of what they were seeing (Connolly & Anderson, 1987, pp. 36–37).

Although most peoples are ethnocentric, the ethnocentrism of wealthy and powerful societies has had greater consequences than that of smaller, less technologically advanced, and more geographically isolated peoples. For example, the historical circumstances that led to the spread of Western culture gave many of its members a strong belief in its superiority to all others. Westerners have been in a position to impose their beliefs and practices on other peoples because of their wealth and their superior military technology. It may matter little, for example, to the average Frenchman if the Dogon (an ethnic group in the African nation Mali) believe that their way of life and beliefs are superior to those of the French. The Dogon have little ability to affect events in France. However, it mattered a great deal to the Dogon that the French believed that their way of life and beliefs were superior. The French colonized Mali and imposed their beliefs and institutions on its people.

Although ethnocentrism gets in the way of understanding other people, a group's belief in the superiority of its way of life may help bind its members together and help them to perpetuate their values. When people no longer believe in their way of life, they may experience anomie, a condition where social and moral norms are absent or confused. This results in great emotional stress, and those who suffer it may even lose interest in living. Such people may be rapidly absorbed by other groups and their culture lost. Anomie may happen under conditions of invasion, colonialism, genocide, and racism.

To the extent that ethnocentrism prevents building bridges between cultures, however, it is maladaptive. When one culture is motivated by ethnocentrism to trespass on another, the harm done can be enormous. It is but a short step from this kind of ethnocentrism to **racism**—beliefs, actions, and patterns of social organization that exclude individuals and groups from the equal exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms based on perceived biological differences. The transformation from ethnocentrism to racism underlies much of the structural inequality that characterizes modern history.

Anthropology and Cultural Relativism

Anthropology helps us understand peoples whose ways of life are different from our own but with whom we share a common human destiny. However, we can never understand a people's behavior if we insist on judging it first. **Cultural relativism** is the idea that a people's values and customs must be understood in terms of the culture to which they belong. Cultural relativists maintain that to understand the logic and dynamics of other cultures, anthropologists must suspend judgment of them. Researchers who view the actions of other people simply in terms of the degree to which they correspond to the observers' notions of right and wrong systematically distort the cultures they study.

Cultural relativism is a fundamental research tool of anthropology. It is distinct from moral relativism—the notion that because no universal standard of behavior exists, people should not judge behaviors as good or evil. Anthropological methods require researchers to suspend judgment but not to dispense with it entirely. There are many things that should offend us. Slavery, genocide, human sacrifice, and racism are all cultural practices. Anthropologists are not required to approve of them to study them. However, it is possible to understand other cultures without believing that their practices are good. Anthropologists insist that every culture has a logic that makes sense to its members. It is our job to understand that logic, even if we do not approve of it or wish that culture for ourselves.

Using the anthropological technique of cultural relativism helps us to see that our own culture is only one design for living among the many in the history of humankind. We can see that our culture came into being under a particular set of historical circumstances. It is not the inevitable result of human social evolution. Understanding this provides a much-needed corrective for ethnocentrism.

From its beginnings, anthropology held a dual promise: contributing to the understanding of human diversity and providing a cultural critique of our own society (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). By becoming aware of cultural alternatives, we are better able to see ourselves as others see us and to use that knowledge to make constructive changes in our society. Through looking at the “other,” we come to understand ourselves.

Ethnography

The Nacirema

Anthropologists have become so familiar with the diversity of ways different peoples behave that they are not usually surprised by even the most exotic customs. However, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go. The Nacirema are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and Tarahumara of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy, but Naciremans spend a considerable portion of the day in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. Such a concern is certainly not unusual, but its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and has a natural tendency to debility and disease. People’s only hope is to avert these through the use of ritual and ceremony, and every family unit has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The rituals associated with the shrine are secret and are normally discussed only with children and only when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest built into the wall in which are kept the many charms and magical potions no native believes they could live without. These preparations are secured from medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts.

Beneath the charm box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows their head before the charm box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of purification. The holy waters are secured from the water temple of the community, where priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Each day, Naciremans perform a complex set of rituals devoted to the mouth. Were it not for these rituals, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them.

In addition to daily mouth rites, the people seek out a “holy mouth man” once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, pokers, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy mouth man uses these tools to scrape, prod, and cut particularly sensitive areas of the mouth. Magical materials believed to arrest decay and draw friends are inserted in the mouth. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy mouth men year after year, even though their teeth continue to decay. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy mouth man as he jabs a poker into an exposed nerve to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved in these practices. And indeed, much of the population shows definite masochistic tendencies. For example, a portion of the daily body ritual performed only by men involves scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument.

Nacirema medicine men have an imposing temple, or latipsoh, in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can be performed only at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the priests who perform miracles but also a permanent group of acolytes who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costumes.

The latipsoh ceremonies are so harsh that it is surprising that sick adults are not only willing but also eager to undergo the protracted ritual purification if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of the temple will not admit a client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained admission and survived the ceremonies, the guardians continue to demand gifts, sometimes pursuing clients to their homes and businesses.

Supplicants entering the temple are first stripped of all their clothes. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost. Naciremans who ordinarily hide their excretory act from even their partners and closest friends suddenly find themselves naked and assisted by an acolyte while they perform their natural functions into a sacred vessel. Most Naciremans are normally prudish, but at the latipsoh, clients find their naked bodies routinely subjected to scrutiny, manipulation, and prodding by members of the opposite sex. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure and may even kill does not decrease the people's faith in the medicine men.

In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices that have their base in native esthetics but depend upon the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make overweight people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people gain weight. Rituals of cutting are used to transform virtually every aspect of the body, from noses to breasts, jowls, arms, even buttocks, and genitalia. General dissatisfaction with the body is symbolized by the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation.

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has shown them to be a magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens they have imposed upon themselves. But even exotic customs such as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight provided by Malinowski when he wrote, "Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in the developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of civilization."

The essay you've just read is adapted from a classic piece of American anthropology written by the anthropologist Horace Miner (1813–1993) in the mid-1950s. Miner's essay draws you in as you read about the strange customs of people who at first appear utterly different from yourself. At some point in your reading, you probably realized that Miner is describing American customs (Nacirema is just American spelled backward) as they might be seen from the point of view of an unknowing but perhaps quite perceptive observer. Your first reaction might be to chuckle at the narrator's misunderstandings and treat the essay as an example of just how deeply an outside observer might be in error about a culture. But if you're a reflective person, you might also wonder if the narrator didn't present some fairly penetrating insights about the nature of our society. Clearly, the narrator has misunderstood some of the ways Americans think about bathrooms, dentists, and hospitals. But is Miner so far off in describing the American attitude toward disease, decay, and death? Finally, if you caught the joke early enough, you might have pondered the meaning of the quote that ends the essay: Have we really "advanced to the higher stages of civilization?" What does that mean anyway?

Critical Thinking Questions

The Nacirema do not generally see themselves as Horace Miner does. But an interpretation that makes no sense to members of the culture being described is not necessarily wrong. Outsiders may be able to perceive essential truths invisible to members of a culture. Given this, how do anthropologists know if their descriptions and analyses are accurate?

Many essays in anthropology have political and social implications. By drawing our attention to aspects of other cultures, anthropologists implicitly ask us to examine our own. What do you think the social and political goals of this essay are?

Miner's essay was written more than half a century ago in 1956. Does it need updating? What has changed about American society and what has not?

Anthropologists and “Natives”

From the late 19th through the mid-20th centuries, when anthropology was developing as a field of study, much of the world was colonized by powerful nations. These nations often held ethnic minorities and traditional societies as subjugated populations. Overwhelmingly, anthropologists came from colonizing countries and worked among the colonized. British and French anthropologists usually worked among colonized people in Africa. American anthropologists often worked with Native American populations or Pacific Islanders in areas under U.S. control.

In the early 20th century, some of the most famous anthropologists, including Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, were women. There were Native American anthropologists, including Ella Deloria, George Hunt, and Edward Dozier; African Americans, including Zora Neale Hurston and St. Clair Drake; African anthropologists such as Jomo Kenyatta, who became the first president of Kenya; and Asian anthropologists, including Fei Hsiao-tung and F. L. K. Hsu. However, it was also true that most anthropologists were white men from powerful countries. This limited their research in important ways. First, since they were men, anthropologists often had few ways of knowing about women’s world or, sometimes, even perceiving it. Second, since anthropologists usually had the backing of governments or powerful institutions, communities had little control over whether or not to accept them. If the colonial government gave an anthropologist permission to work in a village, the residents had to accept them. Third, anthropologists did not have to be responsive to the political or economic needs of the people among whom they worked. Finally, because it was very rare that the people among whom anthropologists worked read their books and articles, anthropologists did not have to be sensitive to their concerns and had little fear of being contradicted by them. Although anthropologists during these times frequently did outstanding and enduring research, the conditions under which they worked inevitably affected their descriptions of society.

Things are different today. Although there are still plenty of men in anthropology, most anthropologists are now women (Ginsberg, 2016). Anthropologists now come from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Anthropology degrees are available from places as diverse as the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, Peking University in China, Seoul National University in Korea, the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, and many hundreds of others around the world.

Sometimes, anthropologists face hazardous, life-threatening situations. But most of the time, they work under conditions of relative safety. However, they work in independent nations among people who can choose to accept or reject them. Many anthropologists study their own ethnic group or community. They, as well as outsiders studying these communities, frequently face reactions and criticism from an audience that includes members of the groups they study.

Anthropologists today must be sensitive to the political and social implications of their work. As contemporary social groups, whether nations or smaller units within nations, search for identity and autonomy, cultural representations become important resources, and traditions once taken for granted become the subject of heightened political consciousness. People want their cultures to be represented to the outside world in ways acceptable to them and may hold anthropologists responsible for the political impact of their work. Anthropologists must carefully consider exactly whose story gets told and why (Campbell, 2010; Faubion & Marcus, 2009).

Anthropologists have responded to these changes in a variety of ways. For example, most anthropologists have become much more explicit about the exact conditions under which their data were collected, their motivations for doing research, and the personal background and values they bring to research. Anthropologists from wealthy countries often work with anthropologists from the countries and communities they study. However, these changes have also added fuel to theoretical disputes that have long simmered in the discipline. Should anthropology try to be an objective social science striving to discover fundamental principles of human social behavior?

Or should it be an interpretive art, engaged in trying to cause people to see and understand the realities of the lives of those who are different from themselves? Should anthropologists be somewhat detached observers or impassioned advocates? If the former, will the anthropologists' data and analysis be accurate? If the latter, will the data and analysis be trustworthy? (See D'Andrade, Scheper-Hughes et al., 1995, for a good exploration of this debate.)

We firmly believe that anthropology benefits from lively discussion of its role and meaning. The participation of anthropologists from many backgrounds, as well as that of members of the communities anthropologists study, makes the discipline richer and the debate more useful. There is time and space for more than one kind of anthropology.

Anthropology and Global Connections

During the early years of anthropology in the 19th and early 20th centuries, anthropologists usually studied societies as if each culture was a separate, well-defined, and isolated unit. Books from this era often include exhaustive descriptions of individual cultures but contain only scant mention of the relationships between cultures. For example, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders*, a well-known ethnography first published in 1922, described people living on an archipelago in the Indian Ocean between India and Thailand. In *The Andaman Islanders*, there are 500 pages of description and analysis of the social organization, ceremonies, religious customs, and technology but only one or two pages describing the connections between the islands and the rest of the world.

Even in the era when Radcliffe-Brown wrote, the Andamans were only relatively isolated. The British government established a penal colony there in the 18th century, and contacts between the islands and the outside world were well established by the time Radcliffe-Brown arrived more than a century later. Radcliffe-Brown did his work by interviewing people at Andaman Homes, an institution founded by a colonial clergyman that functioned as something between a prison and a boarding school (Mukerjee, 2003, p. 50; Pandya, 2005).

Today, the Andaman Islands remain remote from the rest of the world (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). However, you can fly from New York City to the Andamans on regularly scheduled service in under 2 days. You can book your vacation there through www.andamanholidays.com and stay at one of several resorts. You can join the Switzerland-based Andaman Association, and you can view more than 60,000 pictures from the Andamans on Flickr.com. This increased contact has not been good for all of the islands’ residents. One hundred and fifty years ago, there were perhaps 5,000 to 8,000 indigenous people living on the Andaman Islands. Today, the total population of the islands is almost 400,000, but there are fewer than 500 indigenous people. One indigenous group, the Jarawas, remained more or less isolated until the 1990s, when a highway extended into their territory, bringing timber companies, tourists, poachers, and disease. Today, the Jarawa are the largest of the Andaman indigenous groups, but only about 400 remain (Sinha 2021; Stock & Migliano, 2009).

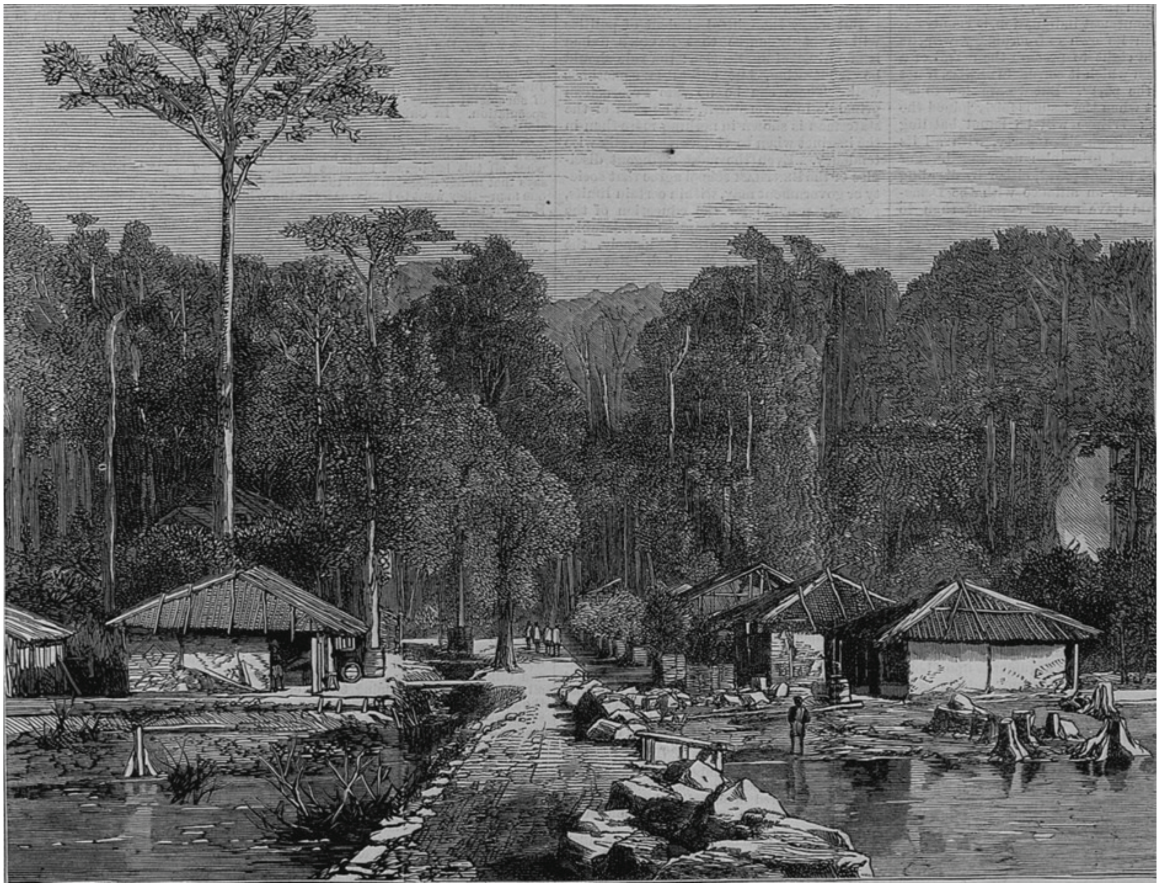


Figure 1.6 Port Blair is the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Here it is in the 19th century.

© CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

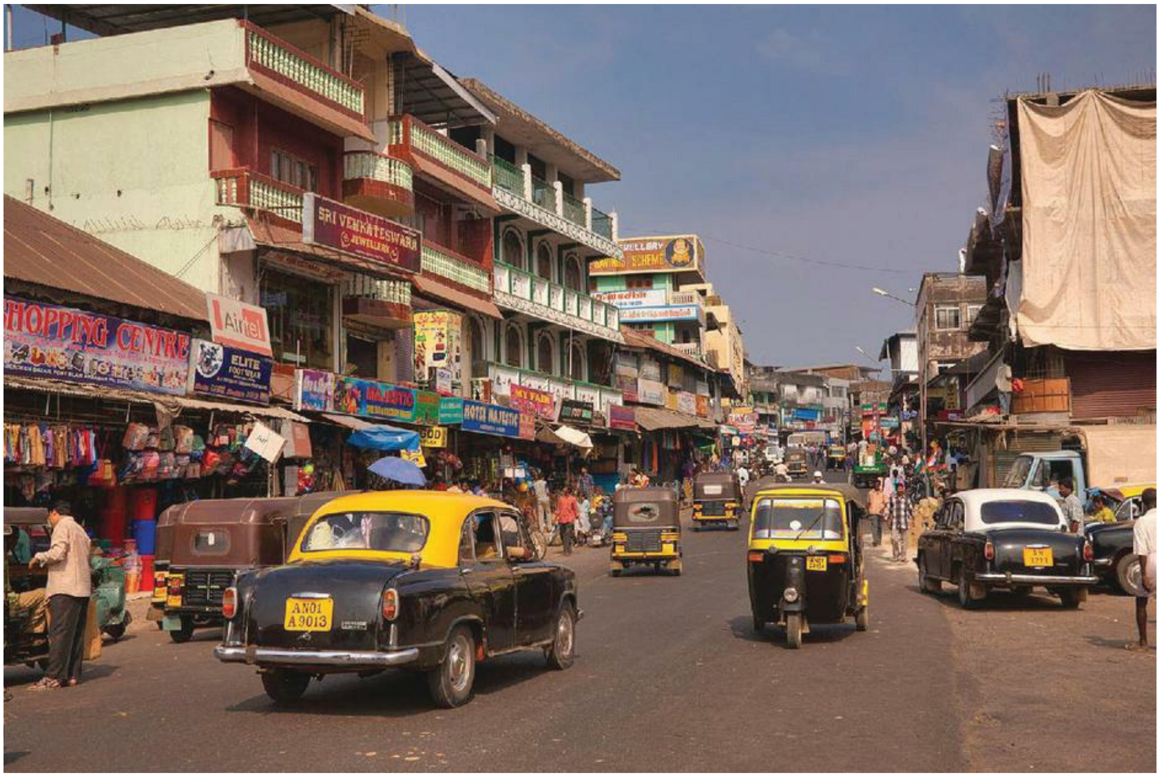


Figure 1.7 This is Port Blair in the early 21st century.

James Davis Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

One of the most compelling facts of our world is that no place is truly isolated. Today, we are connected by lines of transportation and communication. Even more important, we are connected by flows of money, products, people, and information. Policy decisions, wars, natural disasters, fashions, and tastes in one part of the globe have profound effects on the lives of people in many parts of the world. Wars in the Middle East directly affect the lives of American servicemen and their families as well as the millions who live in areas of political instability. The consumption habits of Americans and Chinese affect each other as the price of oil moves up and down in dramatic swings. Styles in clothing in the West affect the lives of villagers in Asia and Latin America as corporations search for the cheapest and most efficient way to produce products. Migration has become so extensive that anyone living in a large Western city is likely to come into contact with people from all over the world every day.

Conversely, individuals living in poverty in rural Africa, Asia, and Latin America are likely to have relatives living in large cities in the United States, Europe, or the Arab world.

These patterns of global interconnection have affected anthropology in many ways and changed how anthropologists work and write. As we saw in the case of Radcliffe-Brown, until the late 20th century, anthropologists generally focused on the particular unique characteristics of the communities they studied. Today, they are far more likely to focus on the relationships and exchanges between those they study and the rest of the world. Anthropologists rarely write works that purport to describe an entire culture. Even books that sound as if they might be descriptions of a single group emphasize global connections. Hillary Kahn’s (2006) *Seeing and Being Seen: The Q’eqchi’ Maya of Livingston, Guatemala, and Beyond* is a good example. It includes chapters on colonialism, how religious belief is connected to exchange with outsiders, and Q’eqchi’ relations with their neighbors, the Garifuna, one quarter of whom have migrated to New York City (Kahn, 2006, p. 12).

The Internet, extremely rapid communication, and the relative ease of travel have all increased the connections between anthropologists and the communities they study. In the early 20th century, anthropologists spent days or weeks traveling to their research sites. Communication was almost entirely by letter, and the mail, if it existed at all, was extremely slow. Today, few research sites are more than 48 hours away from any major world city. Communication, even in quite remote places, is rapid and inexpensive. This means that anthropologists can be in touch with the people with whom they work with far greater frequency.

Rapid communication and economic change have politicized some anthropologists. Anthropologists have often worked with small, relatively isolated groups. These groups most often have little power in the nations that control their territory. Like the Andaman Islanders, they have often suffered enormously from increased contact with the outside world. They have been pushed onto smaller and smaller areas of land, decimated by disease, and exploited by corporations, governments, and even tourists. Anthropologists have responded by becoming increasingly engaged in political and social action. Our interest in defending the rights of indigenous people has sometimes led to activist research in which anthropologists work together with the people they study to formulate strategies to improve their lives and end their oppression (Hale, 2001, p. 13).

We explore global connections and relations of power in many places in this book. The ethnographies in Chapter 5, for example, indicate how making a living in today's world ties many people to others around the world. Chapter 6, "Economics," provides some additional background for understanding the connections among different cultures. In Chapters 7, "Kinship," and 10, "Political Organization," we examine the issues of global migration, and Chapter 9, "Gender," explores some of the new roles of women in a global economy. Religion and art, too, now have global dimensions, which we explore in Chapters 12 and 13. Chapter 14, "Power, Conquest, and a World System," describes the historical development of economic and social links between disparate peoples, and in Chapter 15, "Culture, Change, and the Modern World," we examine many of the problems and prospects that face people in both wealthy and poor nations alike. In addition, each chapter of the book ends with a feature called "The Global and the Local," in which we offer examples of the ways in which global and local cultures interact with each other; these sections include discussion questions about this interaction.

WHY STUDY ANTHROPOLOGY

If you're reading this book for a course at a college or university, and particularly if you are considering a major in anthropology, you've probably faced some strong questioning from friends and family members. Some may have known about anthropology and applauded your wisdom in taking this course. Others may have had no idea what anthropology is. Still, others probably asked you what anthropology is good for and what you hope to do with it. You might have told them that you want to work in one of the many aspects of applied anthropology or to become a college professor, but we think there are other good answers as well.

Some Honest Talk About College Majors and Jobs

Anthropology is, in most places, part of a liberal arts curriculum, which also generally includes English, geography, history, modern languages, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology, as well as other departments and programs. Some liberal arts departments have teacher-training programs. If you want to teach middle school English, in most places, you will probably need a degree in English. Some liberal arts programs involve training in highly technical skills that are directly applicable to jobs. For example, geography departments may offer training in remote sensing, the acquisition and analysis of aerial photography, and multispectral and infrared imagery and radar imagery for use by government and businesses. However, most liberal arts programs produce generalists. An undergraduate degree in psychology does not generally get you a job as a psychologist. Most people who study political science do not go on to be politicians, and few who study sociology go on to work as sociologists. In fact, surveys consistently find that only about 30% of college graduates have jobs that are closely connected with their college major (Abel & Deitz, 2015). For example, a survey of 3,000 alumni from the University of Virginia School of Arts and Sciences found that 70% of respondents reported that there was little such connection. And this survey included many who had majored in subjects that taught very specific technical skills (University of Virginia, 2008). Even more surprising, data from the National Science Foundation show that only about a quarter of science and engineering graduates hold jobs that are related to their degrees and that require at least a bachelor’s degree to perform Landivar (2013).

Despite the statistics just cited, many private and public organizations look specifically to hire anthropologists. The U.S. government is probably the largest employer of anthropologists, followed by Microsoft (Wood, 2013, p. 51). Companies that have hired anthropologists include Intel, Citicorp, AT&T, Kodak, Disney, and General Mills, among many others. Additionally, there are numerous jobs for anthropologists in the public and nonprofit sectors, including positions in international development, social services, museums, national parks, and governmental organizations concerned with national security. In a 2015 article by George Anders in the business magazine *Forbes* titled “That ‘Useless’ Liberal Arts Degree Has Become Tech’s Hottest Ticket,” the chief information officer at a major tech firm argues that technical brilliance is not enough; firms need people who understand culture and processes. A recently published study by Harvard professor David J. Deming (2017) demonstrates that jobs requiring an understanding of social interaction grew rapidly between 1980 and 2012, while the number of less socially informed jobs shrank. Culture, process, and social interaction are skills at which anthropology students excel.

However, like students with other majors, most anthropology graduates go on to more general positions in government, business, and the professions. Some become executives at large corporations, some are restaurateurs, some are lawyers, some are doctors, some are social service workers, some sell insurance, some are government officials, some are diplomats, and, no doubt, some may struggle financially and have to work at entry-level or temporary positions. And you could say the same for the vast majority of students majoring in most subjects.

Asking Better Questions

To refocus our question about the use of anthropology, we might ask the following: What are the particular ways of thought that anthropology courses develop and that apply to the very broad range of occupations that anthropologists follow? How is anthropology different from other social science disciplines? Although there are certainly many ways to answer these questions, it seems to us that three are of particular importance.

First, anthropology is the university discipline that focuses on understanding other groups of people. This focus on culture is one of the most valuable contributions anthropology can make to our ability to understand our world and to analyze and solve problems.

Although the United States has always been an ethnically and culturally diverse place, for most of the 20th century, the reins of wealth and power were held by a dominant group: white Protestant men of northern European ancestry. Members of other groups did sometimes become rich, and there were certainly many poor white Protestants. However, wealthy white Protestants held the majority of positions of influence and power in U.S. society, including executive positions at most large corporations, high political offices at both state and national levels, and seats on the judiciary. As a result, if you happened to be born white, Protestant, and male, you had an advantage. Of course, you might inherit great wealth. But, even if (as was far more likely) you were the son of a factory hand or a shopkeeper, you were a representative of the dominant culture. The ways of the powerful were, more or less, your ways. If members of other cultural groups wanted to speak with you, do business with you, or participate in public and civic affairs with you, they had to learn to do so on your terms—not theirs. They not only had to learn to speak English but also had to learn the forms of address, body language, clothing, manners, and so on appropriate to their role in your culture. Because others had to do the work of changing their behavior, you were probably almost completely unaware of this disparity and accepted it simply as the way things are. *Miami Herald* columnist Leonard Pitts (2009) has pointed out that "if affirmative action is defined as giving preferential treatment on the basis of gender or race, then no one in this country has received more than white men" (p. 214). This is true whether or not such men wanted preference or realized they were getting it.

White, Protestant, northern European men still control most of the wealth in the United States. However, by the late 20th century, their virtual monopoly on power had begun to break up. Members of minority groups have moved to stronger economic and political positions. According to census data, in 2000, people who identify as white made up 69% of the U.S. population. By 2010, that number had dropped to 64%, and in the 2020 census, only 58% of the population said they were white (Tavernise & Gebeloff, 2021). Moreover, the United States increasingly exists in a world filled with powerful nations with very different histories and traditions. It is less and less a world where everyone wants to do business with the United States and is willing to do so on American terms. Instead, it is a rapidly globalizing world characterized by corporations with headquarters and workforces spread across the globe by international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization; and by capital and information flows that cross cultural boundaries in milliseconds. Americans who wish to understand and operate effectively in such a world must learn other cultures and other ways; failure to do so puts them at a distinct disadvantage.

Some of the most important lessons anthropology has to teach concern the idea of race. Biological anthropology shows that humanity is composed of a single race. Biological differences between individual people are very small, and no agreed-upon scientific way of dividing humans into biological races has ever been found. Races are aspects of history and culture rather than of biology. These ideas are explored fully in Chapter 9 on race and ethnicity.

At home, the United States is once again a nation of immigrants. In 2018, the United States had about 44.7 million foreign-born residents, more than 13% of the total population (Frey, 2019; Figure 1.8). Until the late 20th century, most immigrants were cut off from their homelands by politics and by the expense and difficulty of communication. Under these conditions, assimilation to the dominant American culture was essential. Although politics may sometimes prevent truly free communication, today’s immigrants can, in most cases, communicate freely and inexpensively with family and friends in their homelands and may be able to travel back and forth regularly. Thus, complete assimilation is far less necessary or desirable.

Figure 1.8 The United States is a nation of immigrants. In 2018, the United States had about 44.7 million foreign-born residents, more than 13% of the total population. Here, newly sworn-in U.S. citizens celebrate in Lowell, Massachusetts, in January 2019.

iStockphoto.com/JanaShea

Some people may applaud multiculturalism; others may bemoan what they feel is the passing of the “American” way of life. What no one can dispute is that the world of today is vastly different from the world of 1950. Given the increasing integration of economic systems, the declining costs of communication and transportation, and the rising economic power of China and other nations, we can be sure that people of different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds will meet more and more frequently in arenas where none has clear economic and cultural dominance. Thus, an understanding of the nature of culture and knowledge of the basic tools that scholars have devised to analyze it are essential, and anthropology is the place to get them.

In addition to this very practical application, there is a more philosophical concern. Like scholars in many other disciplines, anthropologists grapple with the question of what it means to be a human being. However, they bring some unique tools to bear upon this issue. Within anthropology, we can look for the answer to this question in two seemingly mutually exclusive ways. We can look at culture as simply the sum of everything that humans have done, thought, created, and believed. In a sense, as individual humans, we are heirs to the totality of the cultural practices and experiences humans have ever had. Anthropology is the discipline that attempts to observe, collect, record, and understand the full range of human culture and experience. Through anthropology, we know the great variety of forms that cultures can take. We know the huge variation in social organization, belief systems, production, and family structure that is found in human society. This gives us insight into both the plasticity of human society as well as the limits to variation. It shows humanity as capable of great works of art and intellect, but also of horror and violence.

Alternatively, we can answer the question by ignoring the variability of human culture and focusing on the characteristics that all cultures share. In the 1940s, George Murdock listed 77 characteristics that he believed were common to all cultures. These included such things as dream interpretation, incest taboos, inheritance rules, and religious rituals. More recent authors (Antweiler, 2016; Brown, 1991) have developed other lists and analyses. Brown (1991, p. 143) notes that human universals are very diverse, and there is likely no single explanation for them. However, thinking about such commonalities among cultures may guide us in our attempt to understand human nature.

Finally, a third interest of anthropologists is in creating new and useful ways to think about culture. One particularly effective way to understand culture is to think of it as a set of answers to a particular problem: How does a group of human beings survive together in the world? In other words, culture is a set of behaviors, beliefs, understandings, objects, and ways of interacting that enable a group to survive with greater or lesser success and greater or lesser longevity. At some level, all human societies must answer the question of how to survive together in the world, and to some degree, each culture is a different answer to it.

In the world today and in our own society, we face extraordinary problems: hunger, poverty, inequality, violence between groups, violence within families, drug addiction, pollution, crime. The list is long. However, we are not the only people in the world ever to have faced problems. At some level, all these problems are the result of our attempt to live together as a group on this planet. Learning how other peoples in other places, and perhaps at other times as well, solved or failed to solve their problems may give us the insight to solve our own; we might learn lessons, both positive and negative, from their cultural experiences.

In some ways, the cultures of today are unique. Societies have never been as large and interconnected as many are today. They have never had the wealth that many societies have today. They have never had the levels of technology, abilities to communicate, and/or capacity to destroy that our current global society has. These characteristics make it naive to imagine that we could simply observe a different culture, adopt its ways as our own, and live happily ever after. We can no more re-create tribal culture or ancient culture or even the culture of industrialized nations from 50 years ago than we can walk through walls. But it does not, therefore, follow that the answers of others are useless to us.

In Greek drama, the notion of **hubris** is critical. It is probably best understood as excessive pride or confidence that leads to both arrogance and insolence toward others. In Greek tragedy, the hubris of characters is often their fatal flaw and leads to their downfall. Heroes such as Oedipus and Creon were doomed by their hubris.

We surely won’t find that the members of other cultures have provided ready-made answers to all the problems that confront us. But to imagine ourselves as totally unique, to imagine that the experiences of other peoples and other cultures have nothing to teach us, is a form of hubris, and, as in tragedy, could well lead to our downfall.

The ancient Greeks contrasted hubris with *arete*. This characteristic implies a humble striving for perfection, along with the realization that such perfection cannot be reached. With the notion of *arete* in mind, we approach the study of anthropology cheerfully and with a degree of optimism. From anthropology, we hope to learn new ways of analyzing, understanding, celebrating, and coming to terms with the enormous variations in human cultural behavior. We hope to be able to think creatively about what it means to be human beings and to use what we learn to provide insight into the issues, problems, and possibilities of our own culture. We hope that, with the help of such understanding, we will leave the world a better place than we found it.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

The holistic approach of anthropology can help us understand violence. To what extent is it simply part of human nature, and to what extent is it a product of certain kinds of cultures? Have human beings always been violent, or was there an age when people lived in societies without it? Can we hope for a peaceful future, or are we condemned to ever-increasing cycles of violence?

There are no simple answers to these questions. Anthropologists, political philosophers, and others have sometimes imagined that people in early human societies led a peaceful, almost utopian existence. At other times, they have imagined such societies as a struggle of all against all: a constant battle for survival in which violence against nonfamily and nongroup members was the rule rather than the exception. Neither of these ideas seems to hold much validity.

There is no doubt that humans have often lived in societies characterized by high levels of violence. Further, violence is ancient: A recent analysis of skulls at a 430,000-year-old archaeological site in

Spain shows evidence of humans killing other humans (Sala et al., 2015). But Dr. Nohemi Sala, the lead author of the study, also notes that finds at the same site also show that human ancestors cared for the sick and the dead (Gill, 2015). Caring and killing are both part of the human heritage.

Cultural anthropologists have often documented violence, and sometimes warfare, in many different societies. However, they have documented societies that have extremely low levels of violence as well. These include the Chewong of the Malaysian peninsula (Howell, 1989), the G/wi of central Botswana (Silberbauer, 1982), and the Yanadi of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh (Kumar, 1995). The Semai, a gardening society in the central Malay Peninsula, is one of the best-documented peaceful societies. Clayton and Carole Robarchek, anthropologists who have studied the Semai for more than 30 years, report that worldview is a key factor in Semai peacefulness. Semai see themselves as “essentially helpless in a hostile and malevolent universe” and believe that virtually all activities, even the most innocuous, are fraught with danger (1992, p. 201). In this frightening world, they depend vitally on one another, and anything that threatens discord or violence is understood as a threat to their survival itself. Although their society is peaceful, theirs is not a worldview that many would like to share.

More recently, Steven Pinker in *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) argues that humanity is becoming less violent. He claims that acts of violence, torture, and cruelty of all types, which were common in humanity’s past, are far less present today. Pinker argues that the decline in violence is the result of a combination of factors, including the political dominance of large state societies whose governments monopolize the use of force, the emergence of humanitarian thinking in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, and the spread of commerce. Using a phrase from philosopher Peter Singer, Pinker talks of an “escalator of reason” that we use to discover that our interests are similar to those of other people, and thus, we develop empathy with them.

It is certainly true that public cruelties such as executions and animal fights, common in Europe in the 19th century, have become rare. However, many anthropologists are deeply skeptical of Pinker's claims. For example, anthropologist Rahul Oka and his collaborators have argued that the changes that Pinker documents are simply related to the size of societies. People, they argue, are neither more nor less violent than they have been in the past. However, the larger a society is, the smaller the percentage of people who are involved in violence (Oka et al., 2017, p. E11109). Anthropologists Dean Falk and Charles Hildebolt (2017) make a similar argument, noting that evidence shows humans to be more violent than chimpanzees and that human violence remains more a function of the size of a society rather than the way it is organized or the beliefs of its members. There is no "escalator of reason," merely a demographic effect.

Claims that society has become more peaceful must also confront many disturbing examples of institutionalized violence in our own society. There is little doubt that, in terms of the total number of people killed, the 20th century was the most violent in the history of humanity. New forms of mechanized warfare and new technologies gave people the ability to kill on a scale much greater than before. Much of the death occurred in various forms of state-sponsored violence, from warfare to famines caused by political actions. Even when physical violence is not present, state society includes the pervasive violence of inequality and, in many cases, outright oppression. The use of torture remains an important political issue. At a news conference in early 2017, then- President Donald Trump said that torture "absolutely works" (Masters, 2017), and Gina Haspel, whom he appointed director of the CIA in 2018, is widely believed to have supported torture at secret prisons in the 2000s (Shankar, 2018).

The idea that violence is an acceptable or even a desirable way to resolve disputes may be gaining ground in the United States. In a survey conducted in January 2021, more than a third of Americans, including almost 60% of Republicans, agreed with the following statement: "The traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it" (Cox, 2021).

Anthropology does not provide any easy answers to violence. Instead, it shows that both violence and reconciliation are very basic aspects of human and indeed nonhuman primate behavior. The sources of both peace and violence may ultimately lie in human nature. However, the ways that violence is expressed and the amount of violence present seem to be determined both by demographics and by culture. Humans will probably always have violent thoughts and desires. But we can hope to create societies in which violence is rare or, perhaps, even entirely absent.

Key Questions

1. Do you believe that humankind is getting more or less violent and cruel? What evidence can you bring to support your position?
2. The Robarcheks' analysis of the Semai shows that their peaceful lifestyle is a product of both the way their society is structured and the worldviews they hold. What kind of social structures and worldviews do you think promote peace?
3. Do you believe in the possibility of a society and a world without violence? What do you think is the relationship between physical violence and less obvious forms of violence such as discrimination, inequality, and oppression?

SUMMARY

1. What is the definition of anthropology? Anthropology is the comparative study of human societies and cultures. Its goal is to describe, analyze, and explain different cultures—to show how groups have adapted to their environments and given significance to their lives.
2. In what ways is anthropology holistic? Anthropology is holistic in that it combines the study of human biology, history, language, and the learned and shared patterns of human behavior and thought we call culture in order to analyze human groups.
3. What are the five subdisciplines, or specializations, of

anthropology? The five areas of specialization within anthropology are cultural anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, biological (or physical) anthropology, and applied anthropology.

4. What is the focus of study of biological anthropology? Biological anthropologists study humankind from a biological perspective, focusing on evolution, human variation, skeletal analysis, and primatology, as well as other facets of human biology.
5. What is the focus of study of linguistic anthropology? Linguistic anthropology examines the history, structure, and variation of human language.
6. What is the focus of study of archaeology? Archaeologists try to reconstruct past cultures through the study of their material remains.
7. What is the focus of study of cultural anthropology? Cultural anthropology focuses on the learned and shared ways of behaving typical of a particular human group.
8. What do applied anthropologists do? Applied anthropologists are trained in one of the other subfields. They use anthropological research techniques to solve social, political, and economic problems for governments and other organizations.
9. For medical anthropologists, how do disease and illness differ and what is a syndemic? Disease refers to the biological condition of the body. Illness refers to the culturally shaped ways in which people experience sickness. A syndemic occurs when multiple diseases and social, economic, environmental, and political factors interact.
10. What is ethnocentrism and what is its importance in the study of different cultures? Ethnocentrism is the notion that one’s own culture is superior to all others. Anthropologists find that ethnocentrism is common among almost all people and may serve important roles in society. However, anthropology also shows the problems of judging other people through the narrow perspective of one’s own culture.
11. What is cultural relativism, and is it the same as moral relativism? Cultural relativism is the belief that cultures must be understood as the products of their own histories rather than being judged by comparison with one another or with our own culture.

Anthropologists note that cultural relativism differs from moral relativism; understanding cultures on their own terms does not necessarily imply approval of them.

12. How is the practice of anthropology different today than it was 60 years ago? Until about 60 years ago, anthropologists usually worked in colonies or other controlled areas. “Natives” had little choice about participating in studies and rarely read works by anthropologists. Today, people often determine whether or not they will participate in anthropological studies and frequently read the works of anthropologists.
13. How have anthropologists responded to the increasing interconnections among people throughout the world? Anthropologists are deeply concerned with documenting and understanding how global economic, social, and political processes affect local culture throughout the world. Anthropologists have often been involved in advancing the rights and interests of native peoples.
14. What is anthropology’s relationship to other university disciplines, and what sorts of jobs do anthropology majors hold? Anthropology is part of the liberal arts curriculum. Both the job prospects and the careers of those who study anthropology are similar to those who study other liberal arts disciplines. Anthropology courses develop ways of thinking that apply to the broad range of occupations that anthropologists follow.
15. In what ways is anthropological thinking useful in the world? Anthropology focuses on understanding other groups of people. This is critical because people are more in contact with each other than ever before. Anthropologists grapple with the question of what it means to be a human being. Anthropologists attempt to observe, collect, record, and understand the full range of human cultural experience. Anthropology presents many useful ways of thinking about culture. Learning how other people in other places solved their problems may give us insight in solving our own. Additionally, we can learn lessons from their cultural experiences.
16. What does anthropology tell us about humans and violence? Anthropology tells us that violence is ancient and part of our human heritage. However, peacemaking and reconciliation are

also part of that heritage. Nonviolent societies do exist, and we can hope to build societies with low levels of violence.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Anthropology includes archaeology, biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics. What are the similarities and differences among these approaches, and in what ways do they share goals?
2. The book notes that in some ways, doing anthropology is like teaching fish the meaning of water. Explain what this expression means.
3. Why is ethnocentrism so common in the world, and why is cultural relativism often extremely difficult?
4. Describe some of the ways in which the experiences of anthropologists working today are different from those of anthropologists working 50 or more years ago.

Key Terms

anthropology (p. 2)

applied anthropology (p. 9)

archaeology (p. 6)

biological (or physical) anthropology (p. 5)

cultural anthropology (p. 7)

cultural relativism (p. 14)

culture (p. 8)

emic (perspective) (p. 9)

ethnocentrism (p. 13)

ethnography (p. 9)

ethnology (p. 9)

etic (perspective) (p. 9)

holistic/holism (p. 3)

linguistic anthropology (p. 5)

participant observation (p. 8)

racism (p. 14)

society (p. 7)

2 DOING CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

All in a day of anthropological fieldwork. This group of kids had just won a soccer match. They showed up at the home of Rich Warms (this book’s coauthor) in Bougouni, Mali, asking to have their picture taken to commemorate the occasion. Anthropologists doing fieldwork try to be members of the communities in which they work, and they learn much in that process.

Photo by Peggy Reeves Sanday

Learning Objectives

2.1 Describe the 19th-century origins of anthropology and the research style of anthropologists of that era.

2.2 Compare and contrast different research techniques in anthropology, including participant observation, research conducted from emic and etic perspectives, and cross-cultural research.

2.3 Analyze the importance of gender research, the postmodern critique, and engaged and collaborative work to the field of anthropology.

2.4 List the ethical dilemmas facing anthropology and discuss the ways that anthropologists try to resolve them.

2.5 Evaluate human rights from an anthropological perspective.

To understand human diversity, cultural anthropologists have developed methodologies for gathering data, developing theories, and testing those theories. For both technical and ethical reasons, the controlled laboratory experiments of the physical sciences are usually of little use in cultural anthropology. Anthropologists can hardly go out and start a war somewhere to see its effect on family life. Nor can they control in a laboratory all the factors involved in examining the impact of multinational corporations on villages in the Amazon rainforest. Instead, they look to the existing diversity of human cultures. In place of the artificially controlled laboratory, anthropologists rely on ethnography and cross-cultural comparison.

Ethnography is the gathering and interpretation of information based on the intensive, firsthand study of a particular culture (the written report of such a study is also called an ethnography). Ethnographies help us understand other cultures and are used as a basis for cross-cultural comparisons. Anthropologists analyze the ethnographic data from different societies to build and test hypotheses about general, or even possibly universal, social and cultural processes.

Cultural anthropology encompasses a wide range of activities and specialties. Anthropologists do solitary fieldwork in remote locations, delve into historical archives, test hypotheses using statistical correlations from many different societies, administer formal and informal questionnaires, record life histories, make ethnographic films, curate museum exhibits, and work with indigenous peoples as advocates in cultural and political projects. But all of these activities have their roots in fieldwork: the major source of anthropological data and theory and an important part of most anthropologists' experience. In this chapter, we explore some of the history and practice of fieldwork. We examine fieldwork techniques, different trends in anthropological data collection, and different styles of ethnographic writing. And we discuss some of the ethical issues raised by doing anthropology.

ANTHROPOLOGY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Anthropology was not always based on fieldwork. The first scholars who called themselves anthropologists worked in the second half of the 19th century. Among the most famous of them were Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881, Figure 2.1). Both were brilliant men who traveled widely (Tylor in Mexico and Morgan in the Midwestern United States), but they saw themselves as compilers and analysts of ethnographic accounts rather than as field researchers. For data, they mostly relied on the writings of amateurs such as travelers, explorers, missionaries, and colonial officers, who had recorded their experiences in remote areas of the world. Because of this, critics of Morgan and Tylor sometimes referred to them as “armchair anthropologists.”

Figure 2.1 Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) was a founder of anthropology in the United States. He traveled widely but saw himself as a compiler and analyst of ethnographic accounts rather than as a field researcher.

The History Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

Morgan and Tylor were deeply influenced by the evolutionary ideas of their era, particularly the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. They assumed that these ideas could be applied to human society and used data from archaeological finds and accounts of current-day peoples to produce evolutionary histories of human society. Nineteenth-century anthropologists sometimes referred to simpler societies as “living fossils,” a term borrowed from biology and paleontology. For biologists, living fossils are currently existing plants or animals that closely resemble their fossil ancestors. For 19th-century anthropologists, “living fossils” were societies they thought were unchanged for thousands of years. Anthropologists believed that such societies were living, “fossilized” examples of earlier states of their own society. Morgan, Tylor, and others claimed that by carefully examining and comparing these societies, they could show how human society evolved from its most simple and primitive state to the most complex current societies. They used social institutions such as family and religion as well as technology to place each society on an evolutionary scale of increasing complexity. Their scale began with simple, small-scale societies (classified as living in a state of “savagery”); passed through larger, more centrally organized societies (usually classified as living in a state of “barbarism”); and ended with societies such as their own (which they called “civilization”). Although Morgan and Tylor were deeply critical of many aspects of their own societies, they were also convinced that they lived in the most highly evolved society that had ever existed.

Morgan and Tylor’s evolutionary anthropology had numerous problems. Explorers, colonial officials, and missionaries were highly motivated to play up the most exotic, and often the most brutal, aspects of the societies they described. Doing so increased the fame of the explorers (and the number of books they were able to sell). It made the natives seem more in need of the good government the colonial official claimed to provide or the path to salvation the missionary claimed to offer.

The claim that many societies were “living fossils” was also a problem. Nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropologists assumed that the societies they analyzed were unchanged for thousands of years, but many of these societies were of recent origin. Sometimes they were created by the processes of colonialism and Western expansion itself. And, even if they were ancient, almost all had been dramatically affected by colonialism, trade, and warfare resulting partially from the expansion of European economic interests (Chapter 14 describes this process).

Perhaps most important, the evolutionists were so sure that they had properly formulated the general evolutionary history of society that they twisted and contorted their data to fit their theories. Tylor, for example, wrote that his theoretical perspective was so well established that he could ignore any data that did not fit with the surety that such data were inaccurate (Tylor, 2017/1871).

Franz Boas and American Anthropology

Problems such as these led to a radical reappraisal of evolutionary anthropology at the end of the 19th century. The most important critic of evolutionism was Franz Boas (1858–1942). Born in Minden, Germany, Boas came to the United States after completing his doctorate in physics and geography and living among the Inuit on Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic (Figure 2.2). In the late 1890s, he became the first professor of anthropology at Columbia University in New York City. There he trained many students who became leading anthropologists of the first half of the 20th century. These included A. L. Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Fay-Cooper Cole, Zora Neale Hurston, Gene Weltfish, Manuel Gamio, Gilberto Freyre, Edward Sapir, and many others. As a result, Boas’s ideas had a profound impact on the development of anthropology in the United States.

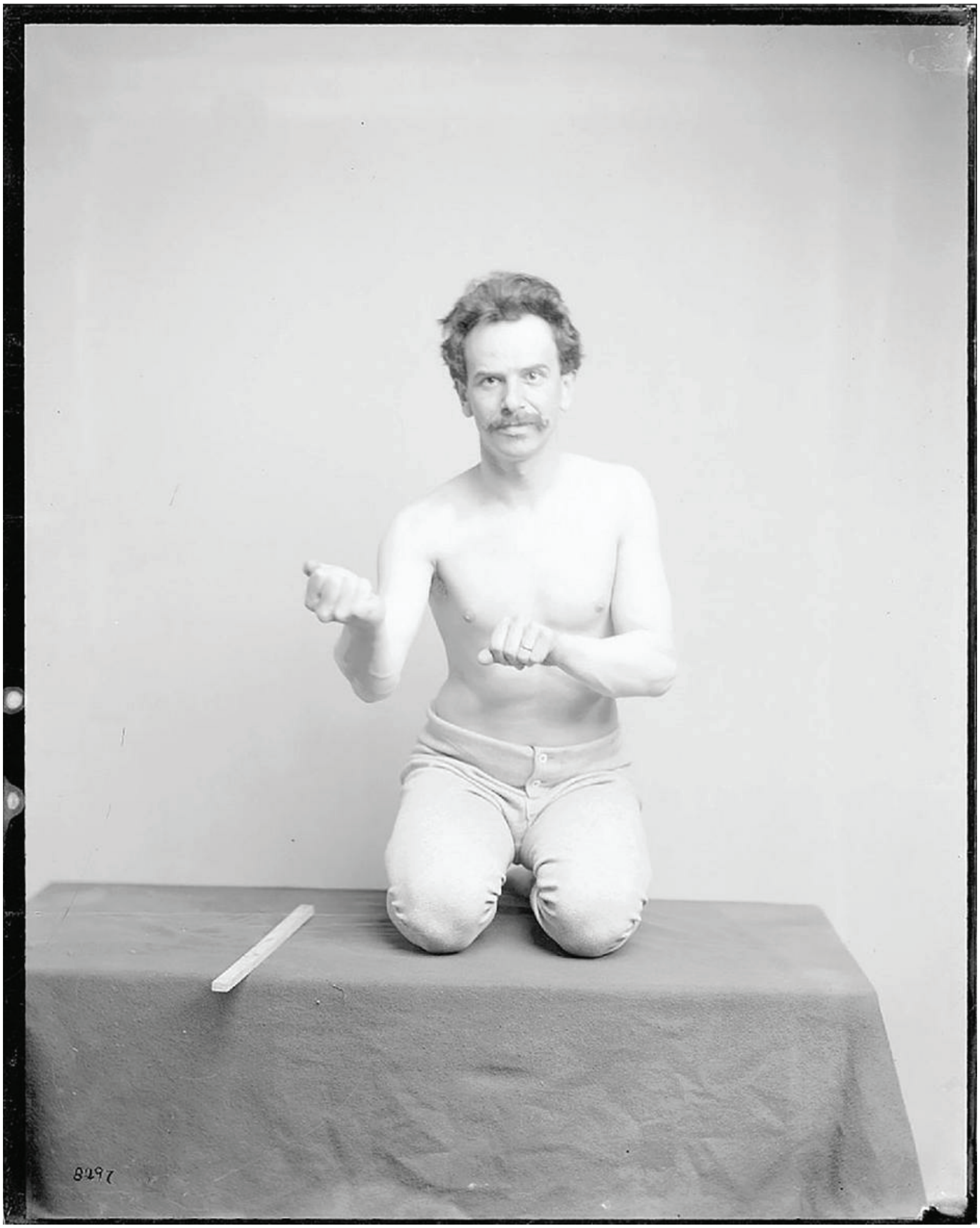


Figure 2.2 In the first half of the 20th century, Franz Boas

(1858-1942) had a huge impact on anthropology in the United States. He emphasized fieldwork and cultural relativism. In this picture, Boas performs part of a Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) dance at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in the 1890s.

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, CC0 1.0
https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/

Boas's studies as well as his experiences among the Inuit convinced him that evolutionary anthropology was both intellectually flawed and, because it treated other people and other societies as inferior to Europeans, morally defective. He was deeply critical of the data-gathering techniques and the reasoning of Morgan, Tylor, and others. Boas argued that anthropologists should not be mere collectors of tales and spinners of theories but rather should devote themselves to fieldwork and objective data collection. Anthropologists must live among the people they studied, carefully collecting the stories of elders and inventorying the material goods they possessed. They should study people holistically, recording the cultural patterns of the group, their language, the tools they used, and their religion. Anthropologists should investigate the group using archaeology and historical archives. They should collect statistical measures of the bodies of those they studied.

One of Boas's core beliefs was that cultures must be understood in context. Cultures, he argued, are the products of their histories. Therefore, each culture's standards of beauty and morality, as well as many other aspects of its members' behavior, could be understood only in light of that culture's historical development. Because our ideas were also the products of our history, it was inappropriate to use our standards to judge other cultures. Evolutionists had failed, in part, because they had made just this mistake. They assumed, incorrectly, that the more a culture's values, morals, and esthetic standards approached those of Europeans, the more evolved that culture was. In other words, the evolutionists failed because of their ethnocentrism, their belief that their culture was better than any other. As discussed in

Chapter 1, ethnocentrism is the application of the historical standards of beauty, worth, and morality developed in one culture to all other cultures.

Boas insisted that anthropologists free themselves as much as possible from ethnocentrism and approach each culture on its own terms, carefully considering the notions of worth and value carried by its members. This position came to be known as cultural relativism, and it is one of the distinguishing features of anthropology. Boas and his followers maintained that anthropologists must suspend judgment to understand the logic and dynamics of other cultures. Researchers systematically distort the cultures they study if they view the actions of people in those cultures simply in terms of the degree to which those actions correspond to the researcher's notions of the ways people should behave.

Boas was a tireless campaigner for human rights and justice. He argued that all human beings had an equal capacity for culture and that although human actions might be considered morally right or wrong, no culture was more evolved or of greater value than another. He was an unwavering supporter of racial equality. His work and that of his students, notably Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, were widely used by Americans who argued for the equality of men and women and the rights of African Americans, immigrants, and Native Americans. He had a deep effect on African American activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois (V. J. Williams, 1996) and was cited in the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing separate but equal schooling (Baker, 2000). He was, in a sense, the first activist anthropologist. Today, virtually all anthropologists rely on Boas's basic insights.

From Haddon to Malinowski in England and the Commonwealth

While Boas was forming his ideas in the United States, a separate fieldwork tradition was developing in Britain. In the late 19th century, Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940) mounted two expeditions to the Torres Straits (between New Guinea and Australia). Haddon was originally a biologist, but his travels turned his interest to ethnography, the gathering and interpretation of information based on intensive, firsthand study. In 1898, Haddon’s second expedition included scholars from several different fields. Haddon and his colleagues became professors at Cambridge and the London School of Economics, where they trained the next generation of British Commonwealth anthropologists. Like Boas, their understandings were based on fieldwork, and they made it a basic part of their students’ training.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) (Figure 2.3) was one of the most prominent students of the Torres Straits scholars. Malinowski grew up in Krakow, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now in Poland). He went to England to study ethnography, and his mentor, Charles Seligman, sent him to do fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands (in the Torres Straits). Malinowski arrived in the Trobriands in 1914, as World War I broke out. Because the Trobriands were governed by Australia and Malinowski was a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was considered an enemy national. As a result, he was unable to leave the region until the end of the war. Thus, what he had intended as a relatively short fieldwork expedition became an extremely long one.

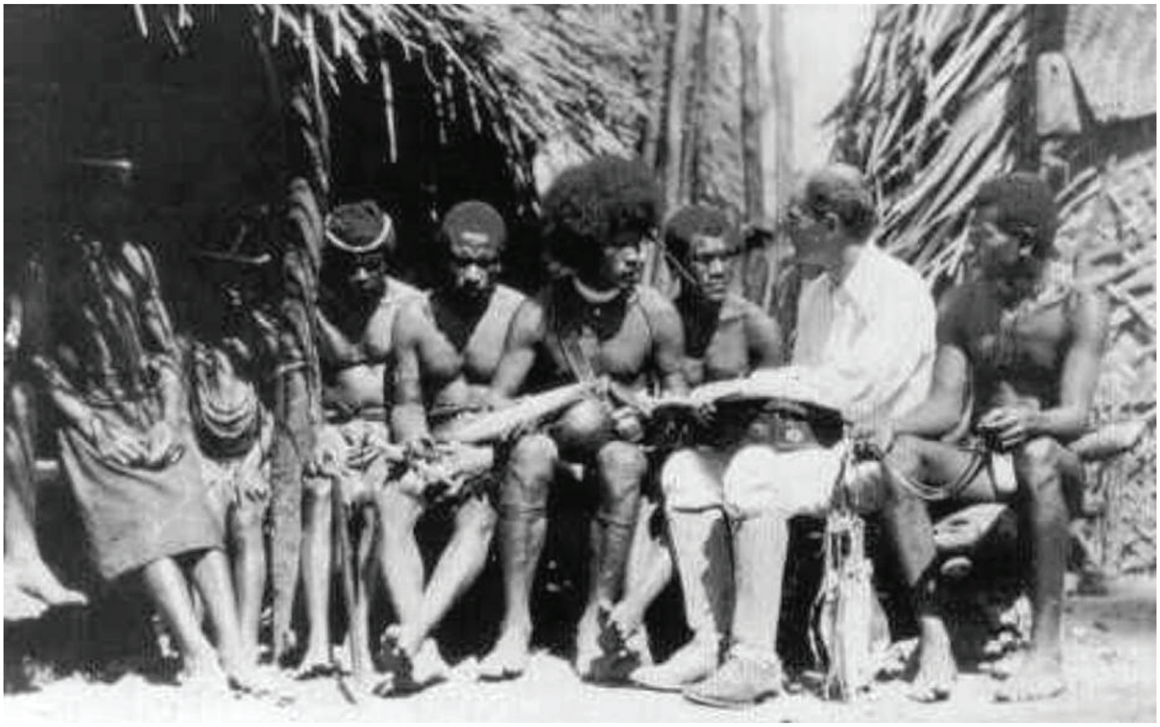
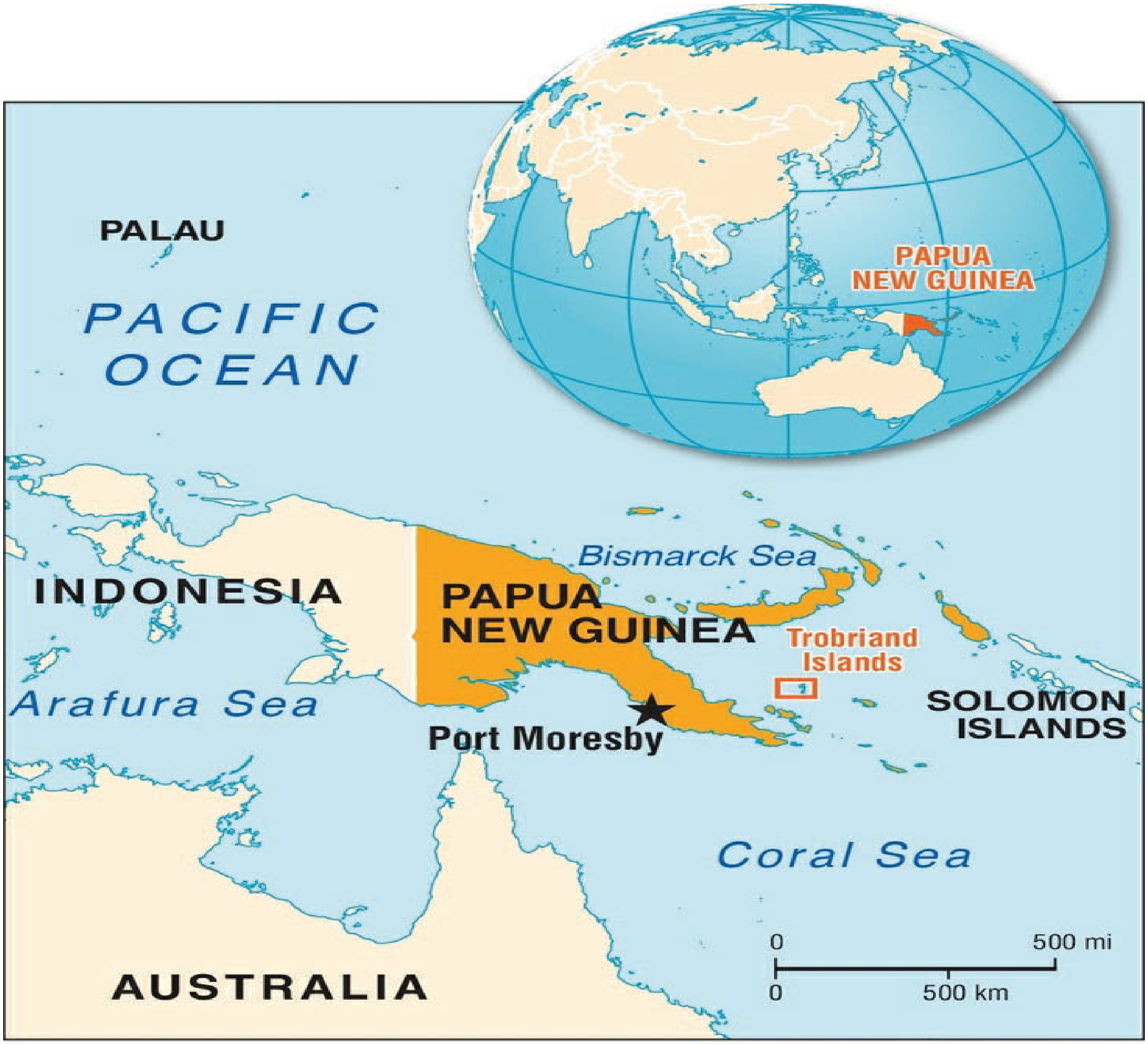
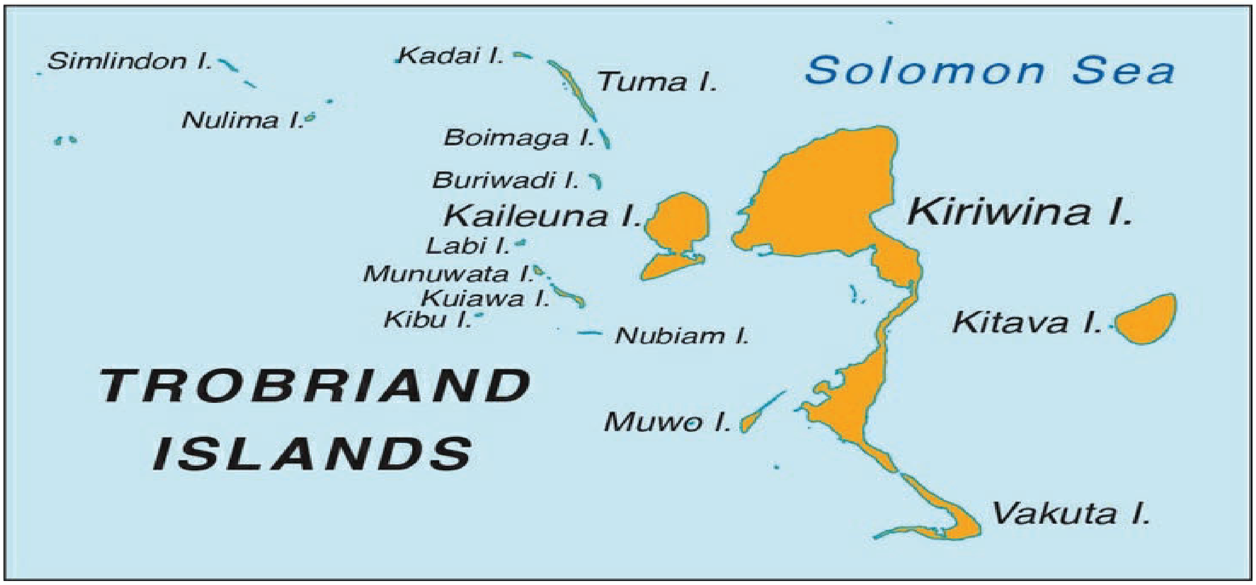


Figure 2.3 Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), one of the pioneers of participant observation, worked in the Trobriand Islands between 1915 and 1918. He appears here with Trobriand Islanders.

History and Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo


PALAU
PACIFIC OCEAN
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Bismarck Sea
INDONESIA
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Trobriand Islands
Arafura Sea
SOLOMON ISLANDS
Port Moresby
Coral Sea
0
500 mi
0
500 km
AUSTRALIA


Simlindon I.
Kadai I.
Tuma I.
Solomon Sea
Nulima I.
Boimaga I.
Buriwadi I.
Kaileuna I.
Kiriwina I.
Labi I.
Munuwata I.
Kuiawa I.
Kibu I.
Nubiam I.
Kitava I.
TROBRIAND ISLANDS
Muwo I.
Vakuta I.

Description

Map 2.1 Map of New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands.

Malinowski's time on the Trobriands was a signal moment in British Commonwealth anthropology. The Torres Straits scholars had studied culture at a distance, observing it for a short time and then describing it. Malinowski spent years with native Trobrianders, learning their language, their patterns of thought, and their cultural ways. Malinowski later wrote that if anthropologists wanted to understand the cultures they studied, they needed to "put aside camera, notebook and pencil and join in [themselves] in what is going on" (1984, p. 21). In other words, anthropologists should not be content with interviewing people and collecting their histories and genealogies. Rather, they should, to the greatest extent possible, participate in the lives and daily activities of the people they sought to understand. This style of fieldwork, which, as we learned in Chapter 1, is called participant observation, became a basic research tool for anthropologists trained in the British Commonwealth and the United States.

A diary Malinowski kept during his Trobriand work shows he was frequently lonely, frustrated, and angry. Despite these problems, he developed a form of ethnography centered on empathic understandings of native lifeways. He analyzed culture by describing social institutions and showing the cultural and psychological functions they performed. Malinowski also stressed the interrelations among the elements of culture.

In an era when non-Europeans were often considered incomprehensible and illogical, Malinowski forcefully promoted the idea that native cultural ways were logical and rational. For example, in a famous essay on science and magic, he argued that natives used magic only for goals (such as controlling the weather) that they were unable to attain by more rational means. He argued that magic was like science in that it had "a definite aim intimately associated with human instincts, needs, and pursuits." Like science, magic was “governed by a theory, by a system of principles which dictate the manner in which the act has to be performed in order to be effective” (1948, p. 66).

After his return from the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski became a professor at the London School of Economics. Like Boas, he trained many students, encouraging them to conduct fieldwork based on participant observation and imbuing them with the idea that the actions of non-Western people were rational.

Malinowski’s and Boas’s anthropologies were quite different. Boas and his students focused on understanding cultures with a focus on their contexts and histories. Malinowski and his students emphasized the notion of function: the contribution made by social practices and institutions to the maintenance and stability of society. However, both developed traditions of fieldwork and participant observation. Both traditions have a strong history of opposition to racism. Both saw other members of cultures as fully rational and neither superior nor inferior to their own. There have been a great many new approaches in anthropology since the days of Boas and Malinowski, but these fundamental insights and principles remain basic to current-day anthropology.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES

Today, anthropologists work for a wide variety of employers, including universities, businesses, and governments. You find them investigating topics as varied as the way people hunt in Paraguay (Blaser, 2009), illness and injury among migrant farm workers in the United States (Horton, 2016), language and ethnicity among the Maya in Guatemala (Romero, 2015), the meanings British hoarders attach to the things they collect (Orr et al., 2017), the relationship between music editing and choreography in international air guitar competitions (McDaniel, 2017), and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic (Manderson et al., 2021). Because of the multiplicity of anthropologies, it would be impossible to describe all the different settings in which anthropologists work and the different ways they go about their work. However, almost all anthropological work has some similarities.

Since the days of Boas and Haddon, fieldwork has been the cornerstone of anthropology. Most anthropological data are generated through fieldwork, and virtually all anthropologists do fieldwork as part of their graduate training. For most, doing fieldwork continues as a basic element of their careers. Some anthropologists return to the same fieldwork location year after year, creating a record of the community throughout their lifetime. Others may change their fieldwork location and the research problems that concern them every few years.

Fieldwork in anthropology is the firsthand, intensive, systematic exploration of a culture. Although fieldwork includes many techniques, such as structured and unstructured interviewing, mapping space, taking census data, photographing and filming, using historical archives, and recording life histories, for most anthropologists, the heart of anthropological fieldwork is participant observation. Participant observation is the technique of gathering data on human cultures by living among people, observing their social interaction on an ongoing daily basis, and participating as much as possible in their lives (Figure 2.4). This intensive field experience is the methodological hallmark of cultural anthropology. In other social science disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and economics, the key methodological tools tend to be laboratory experimentation, large-scale survey, close readings of archives, or analysis of statistical information. Anthropologists believe that only by living with people and engaging in their activities can we begin to understand the interrelated patterns of culture. Anthropologists observe, listen, ask questions, and attempt to find a way in which to participate in the life of the societies they study. Although the length of time anthropologists spend living with people during a major fieldwork-based project varies, it is typically over a year.

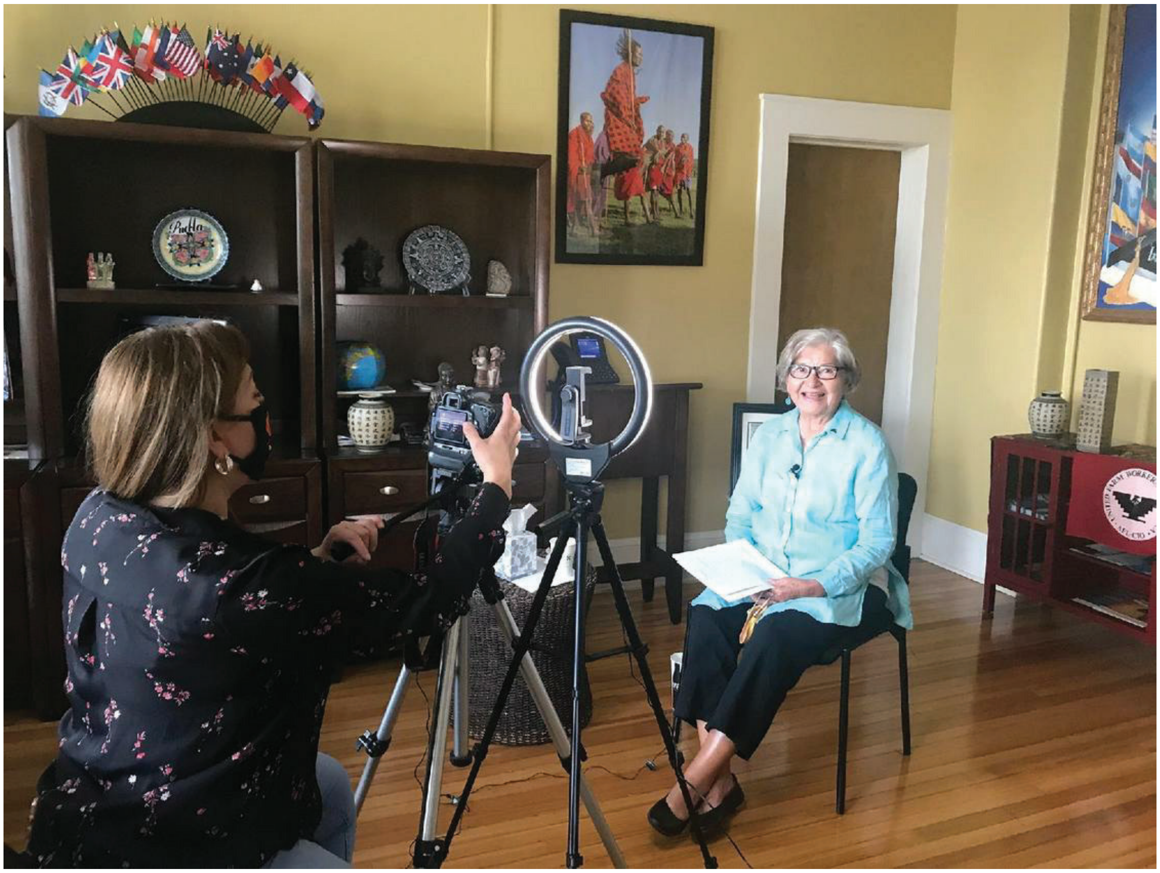


Figure 2.4 Aimee Villarreal

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Participant observation has both advantages and limitations. Perhaps the key advantage is that anthropologists are on the job 24/7. Anthropologists observe people at work, at play, and when they are socializing. They share the good times of the communities where they work and frequently the tragedies as well. Regardless of their specific interests, the constant attempt to participate in another culture gives anthropologists a depth of understanding that is almost impossible to achieve in any other way.

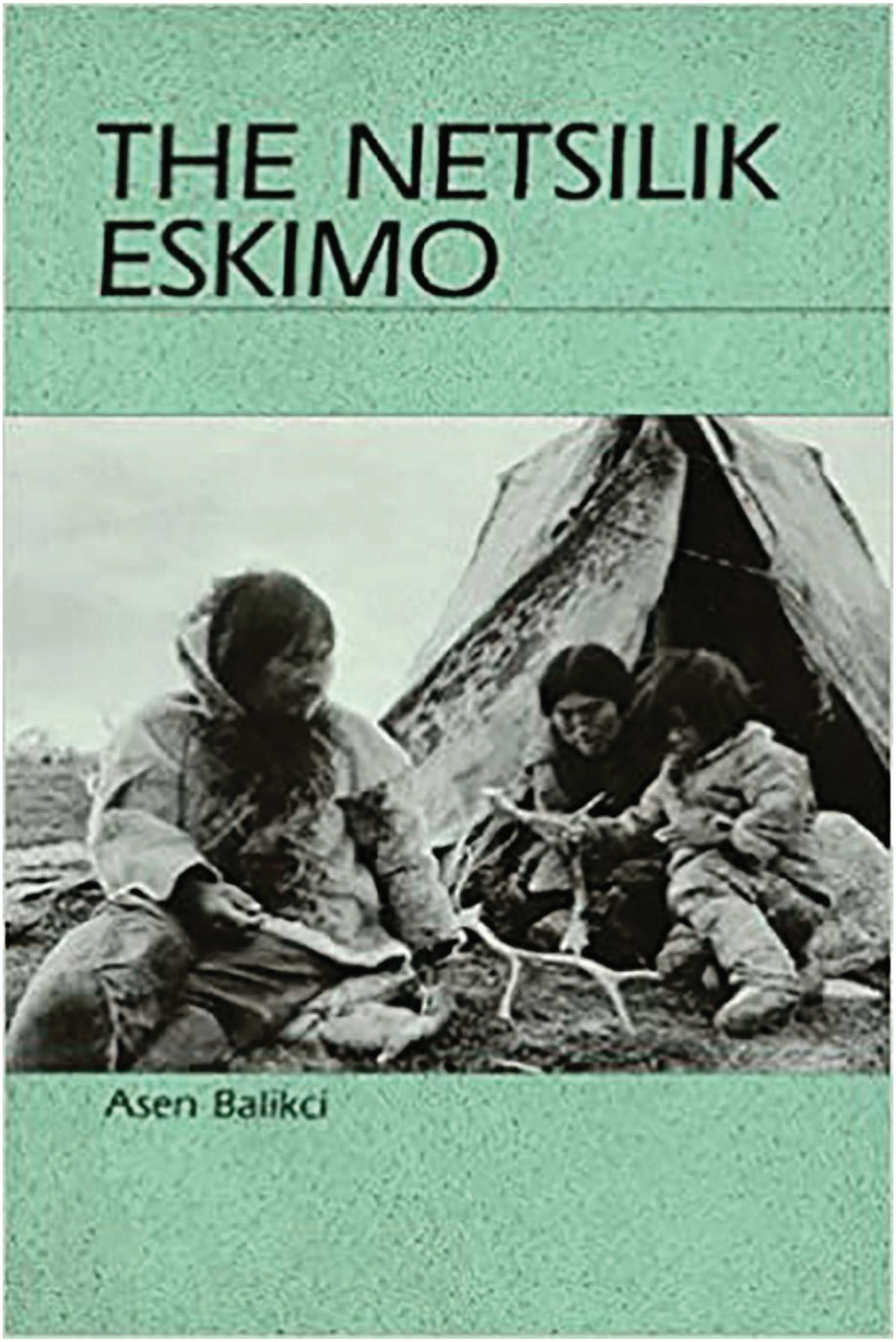
An important limitation of participant observation is that anthropologists necessarily work with a relatively small number of individuals. A sociologist carrying out a carefully constructed survey of several thousand individuals may be able to describe certain aspects of a large community accurately. Anthropologists rarely work with more than 50 individuals, and it is sometimes difficult to say how well these individuals represent larger communities.

Sometimes anthropologists will pay for their research themselves, but since research frequently involves extended stays in distant places, doing it is fairly expensive. Because of this, fieldwork is often funded by grants given by universities, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations that promote social science research. Examples of organizations that fund anthropological research include the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, the American Museum of Natural History, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the U.S. government, through its Fulbright Scholar Program.

In most cases, anthropologists are required to submit their research proposals to an **institutional review board (IRB)**. An IRB is a committee organized by a university or other research institution that approves, monitors, and reviews all research that involves human subjects. The goal of an IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of the research subjects, the research institution, and the researchers themselves. IRBs were originally started to review medical research, but in most places, they have expanded their scope of operations to include all research involving living people.

Decisions about which communities anthropologists investigate are based on many factors. Some of these include personal history, geographical preferences, political stability, cost, physical danger, and connections their professors and other mentors may have. However, the most critical aspect of choosing a location has to do with the research questions that the anthropologist wishes to answer.

In the early 20th century, anthropologists studying relatively small groups often attempted to write complete descriptions of societies. Their books, which had titles such as *Portrait of a People: The Tiwi of North Australia* (Hart & Pilling, 1960), *The Sebei: A Study in Adaptation* (Goldschmidt, 1986), and *The Cheyennes: Indians of the Great Plains* (Hoebel, 1960; Figure 2.5), contained chapters on the whole range of culture and society, including subjects such as family, religion, farming, and legal affairs. In a sense, it did not matter much where these authors chose to work; any small-scale community or society could be described.



THE NETSILIK ESKIMO

Asen Balikci

Figure 2.5 Until the last third of the 20th century, many ethnographies, like *The Netsilik Eskimo*, were intended as complete descriptions of societies.

Reprinted by permission of Waveland Press, Inc. From The Netsilik Eskimo. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., © 1970. All rights reserved.

Today, few anthropologists attempt to write such descriptions. This is partly because most feel that societies are so complex they cannot be adequately described in a single work. But more important, although societies were never really isolated, today they are so interconnected and so changed by these connections that they must be seen in regional and global contexts. Current ethnographies focus on specific situations, individuals, and events and frequently on culture change. Some recent examples describe inequality and food rights in Uzbekistan (Rosenberger, 2012), families and reproductive technologies in India (Khanna, 2010), and the commercialization of traditional medicine in Bolivia (Sikkink, 2010). As research questions have narrowed, the conditions under which and the locations where they can be answered have become more specific.

After they have identified an area of general interest, anthropologists spend a great deal of time reading the existing research on their subject. It is no exaggeration to say that most researchers spend many hours reading for each hour they spend doing active field research. From their studies, they gain an understanding of the geography, history, and culture of their chosen area. They find out what is known and what remains to be learned about the subjects of their interest. Then they try to design projects that help to close the gaps in existing knowledge. It is a bit like filling in pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, with one important exception: You can finish a puzzle, but good research leads to the posing of interesting questions and, thus, more research.

The opportunity to do participant observation, to live a life and understand a culture very different from the one in which the anthropologist grew up, is one of the key factors that bring people to anthropology. However, arriving at a field location can be a difficult and disorienting experience. Often, anthropologists will have made a brief trip to the field location to arrange logistics such as obtaining the necessary research clearances and finding a place to stay. Despite this and a great deal of other preparation, for most people, living in another culture and trying to learn its ways is difficult. Culture is learned behavior, and we have been learning our culture since the moment of our births. When we move to a radically different culture, much of that learning is no longer relevant.

Anthropologists arriving in new cultures are in many ways like children. Their local language skills are often weak, and their speech is sometimes babyish. Their social skills are undeveloped. They are ignorant of many aspects of their social and physical environment. One common result of this is the syndrome often called **culture shock**—the feelings of alienation, loneliness, and isolation common to one who has been placed in a new culture (Figure 2.6). Almost all researchers experience some degree of culture shock. For graduate students, sometimes the journey stops there. You can be an outstanding scholar—well versed in literature and able to think and write creatively—yet be unable to do fieldwork. Sometimes aspiring anthropologists return after a few weeks of fieldwork and pursue other fields of study.

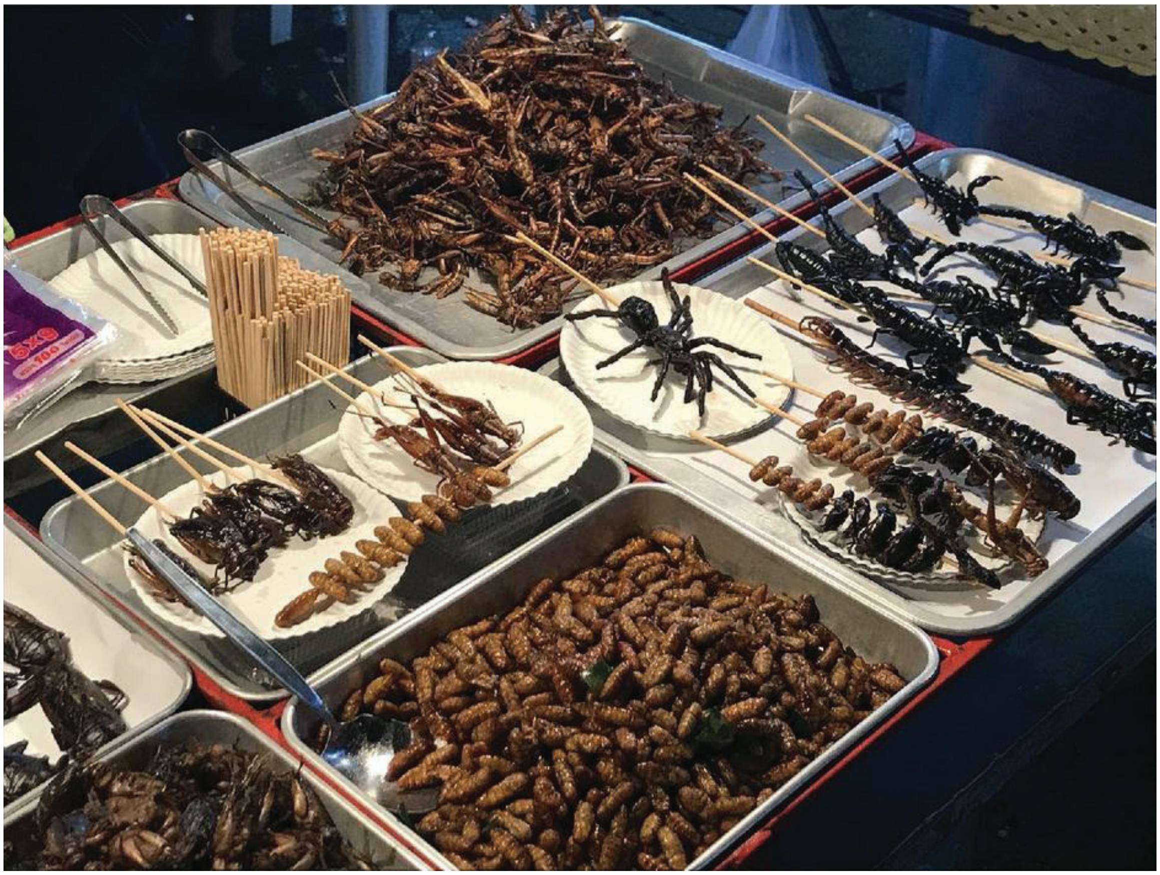


Figure 2.6 Insects are difficult foods to learn to eat for most Americans but are highly prized in other cultures. In this photo, snacks of insects, spiders, and scorpions are for sale in Thailand.

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Getting past culture shock is a process of learning. Anthropologists need to learn the language, customs, and social organization of the groups they study. They need to acquire the fundamental grounding knowledge that it takes to be an adult in a different culture. It is probably accurate to say most anthropologists never feel like they are truly members of the cultures they study. We are separated from our subjects by our backgrounds, education, and sometimes the way we look and the color of our skin. Perhaps most important, most of us are separated by the knowledge that our time in the field is temporary and we will leave to rejoin our other lives. However, in our best moments, anthropologists do come close to acting and feeling like members of the cultures we study.

Although almost all anthropologists rely on participant observation, there are numerous different styles of anthropological research within this general method. The research techniques and tools that anthropologists use depend on the type of research they do and the sorts of questions they want to answer. As mentioned in Chapter 1, anthropological research styles are sometimes characterized as either emic or etic, terms drawn from the study of language. Anthropologists using the emic perspective seek to understand how cultures look from the inside. Emic research aims to enable cultural outsiders to gain a sense of what it might be like to be a member of the culture. Anthropologists using an etic perspective seek to derive principles or rules that explain the behavior of members of a culture. Etic analysis may produce conclusions that conflict with the ways in which people understand their own culture. However, etic research is judged by the usefulness of the hypotheses it generates and the degree to which it accurately describes behavior, not by whether or not members of the culture studied agree with its conclusions.

Some anthropological research follows a model drawn from the natural sciences. In this sort of research, anthropologists propose a hypothesis and collect empirical data to determine if the hypothesis can be supported. For example, Wendy Phillips (2005) analyzed pregnancy beliefs among women of African descent in three communities in the United States. The communities differed in the degree and extent of their contact with the dominant American culture. Phillips hypothesized that the women who historically had the least contact with the dominant culture would report more traditional practices. She interviewed 36 mothers with children under the age of 5, 12 from each community. Her analysis of the interview data largely confirmed her hypothesis, although she found that some West African beliefs persisted even among members of the community with the greatest contact with the dominant culture.

Some anthropological research is more highly interpretive and uses techniques drawn from the study of history and literature. For example, Allison Truitt (2008) studied the important role of motorbikes in current-day urban Vietnam. She had no formal hypothesis but used data from interviews, advertisements, observations of traffic patterns, and legal codes to analyze the value and meaning of motorcycles in Vietnamese culture (Figure 2.7). She explored both the practical and symbolic importance of motorcycles, showing how motorcycles are markers of social and economic mobility and middle-class identity. Her work describes how motorcycles have become key symbols in a political struggle that pits consumer demand against government attempts to control production and consumption.

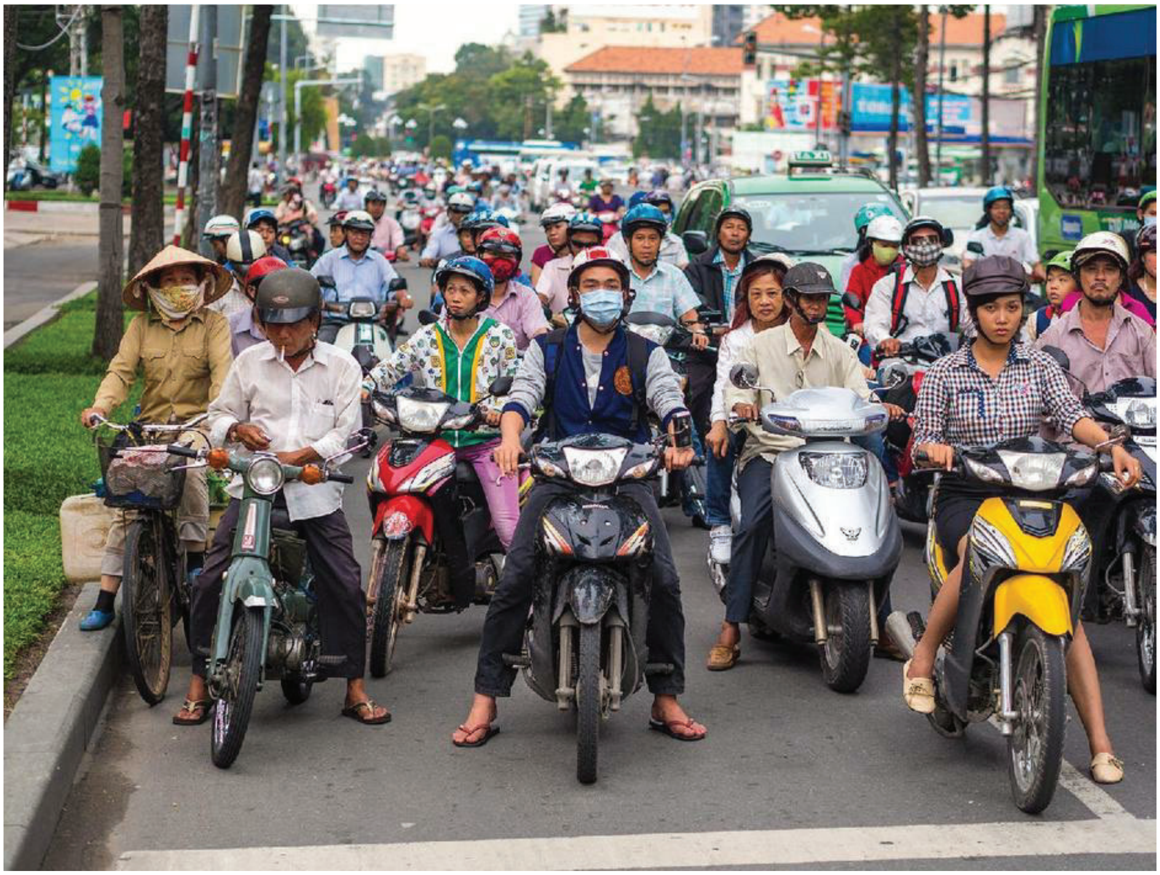

Figure 2.7 Allison Truitt used data from interviews, advertisements, observations of traffic patterns, and legal codes to understand the importance of motorcycles in current Vietnamese culture. In this picture, motorcycles

crowd the streets of Ho Chi Mihn City in 2012.

iStockphoto.com/holgs

Regardless of their style of research, in most cases, as anthropologists begin to observe and participate in new cultures, they develop networks of contacts. These are often the people who both guide anthropologists in their new surroundings and offer insights into the culture. Anthropologists often develop deep connections, and even lifetime friendships, with some of these contacts (Grindal & Salamone, 1995). Historically, in anthropology, such friends and contacts are called **informants**, though the term has fallen somewhat out of use (to some, it sounds too much like spying). More current terms are *respondents*, *interlocutors*, and *consultants*. To some, these terms emphasize the collaborative nature of fieldwork and suggest that the people who work with anthropologists are active and empowered. Regardless of what these people are called, anthropologists learn much of what they know from such people. In some cases, anthropologists work with a few individuals (sometimes called key informants) who they believe are both knowledgeable and eager to talk with them. Alternatively, they may construct statistical models and use techniques such as random sampling to choose their consultants. Sometimes they work in places that are small enough that they can interview all members of a community.

In the early stages of fieldwork, anthropologists may just observe. Within a short time, however, they will begin to participate in cultural activities. Participation is the best way to understand the difference between what people say they do, feel, or think and what they actually do, feel, or think. It is not that informants deliberately lie (although they may) but rather that anthropologists and informants have particular interests and individual ways of looking at issues. People wish to present their lives, their families, and their communities in a certain light. No one, including anthropologists, can present a fully accurate and unbiased portrait of a culture. Participation, however, forces researchers to think more deeply about culture and gives greater context and depth to the information they glean through interviews and observation.

Working with consultants is often informal, but anthropologists also use an arsenal of more formal tools depending on their theoretical interests. Much of anthropology is done by interviewing, and anthropologists use many different interview techniques. Some anthropologists prepare exhaustive inventories and questionnaires; however, more frequently, they design a series of open-ended questions that allow their subjects to talk freely and extensively on a topic. Occasionally, an anthropologist will use a structured interview, a technique designed to help identify the objects and ideas that their consultant thinks are important (Spradley, 1979). Because kinship structures are important elements of many societies, anthropologists also become adept at gathering genealogical information. Table 2.1 details some specific types of interviews. Almost all anthropologists use informal, unstructured, and semistructured interviews. Structured interviews are less common.

Table 2.1 Interviewing Techniques

Informal Interviews	Researchers engage in, overhear, remember, and write down conversations from their daily experiences.
Unstructured Interviews	Researchers engage with subjects in a scheduled conversation. Researchers may have a plan but informants are allowed to express themselves as they choose.
Semistructured Interviews	Similar to an unstructured interview but based on the use of a written list of questions or topics that the researchers intend to cover in a specific order.
Structured Interview	Researchers ask different subjects to respond to a set of questions as nearly identical as possible. This often involves the use of very explicit instructions.

In addition to interviewing, anthropological data gathering also includes mapping, photography, careful and silent observation of a wide range of activities, measurements of various kinds of production, and, in some cases, serving in apprenticeships. It all depends on the nature of the problem an anthropologist is investigating.

As with the techniques used, the analysis of data also depends on the questions being asked and the theoretical perspective of the researcher. Anthropological data generally come in the form of extensive field notes, voice recordings, and photographs. In most cases, organizing data presents substantial challenges. Notes have to be indexed, recordings transcribed, and data entered in spreadsheets. Aspiring anthropologists should keep in mind that, as with background research, successful anthropologists often spend more time working with their data than they did collecting it in the first place. Recording an interview may take only an hour or two. Transcribing and indexing that recording may take several days. Anthropologists increasingly use computer-based analytic tools, particularly Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, often referred to as CAQDAS. Some examples of CAQDAS include NVivo, Atlas.ti, and MAXQDA.

Ethnography

Dangerous Field

Throughout much of the history of anthropology, researchers assumed that they would be safe in the field. Most students are drawn to anthropology at least partially by the chance to do work in interesting places—to live with people, learn their ways of life, and become friends with them (Chagnon, 1997). Anthropologists have generally assumed that they will work under conditions of stability, trust, quietude, security, and freedom from fear. Although anthropologists today do often work in places where these conditions are possible, in many other places, anthropology, if it is done at all, is done under conditions of instability and violence.

A 1990 study of dangers to anthropologists in the field identified malaria, hepatitis, and vehicle crashes as the three greatest risks anthropologists face (Howell, 1990). However, the study also noted a surprisingly high rate of encounters with violence, criminality, and political instability. For example, at least 42% of anthropologists had experienced “criminal interpersonal hazards” and 22% reported living through political turmoil such as war, revolution, and rioting. A more recent study pointed to the problems of random violence, drug gangs and mafias, and state violence from the police, military, and paramilitary (Goldstein, 2014).

J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat (2002) pointed out that the conditions under which Malinowski, Mead, and many other anthropologists operated were, in many cases, artificially peaceful. Anthropologists worked in areas that were controlled by colonial governments or were American protectorates. In these cases, hostility among groups was suppressed and managed by colonial authorities. Anthropologists themselves, regardless of who they worked for, were protected by these authorities, and natives could expect that violence against anthropologists would be punished rapidly and harshly.

The world of colonial anthropology is gone. Although most anthropologists today continue to work under conditions of relative peace and security, some work in conditions of danger and physical risk to themselves and those who work with them. Kovats-Bernat has worked on the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in an area of the city often called “Kosovo” because of the prevalence of gangsterism, political violence, and drug terrorism (Figure 2.8). Most of the street kids in the area sniff glue, and some carry razors. Kovats-Bernat reported that he has at various times “been present at street shootings, threatened, searched, suspected of subversion, and in the midst of crossfire” (2002, p. 209).

Figure 2.8 Anthropology can be dangerous. In the early 2000s, Christopher Kovats-Bernat worked in the slums of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, seen here, in an area where gangsterism, political violence, and drug terrorism were common.

iStockphoto.com/Claudiad

Anthropologists have faced danger and physical violence during fieldwork in many parts of the world. *Ethnography as Risky Business* (Koonings, 2019), a recent essay collection, recounts anthropological experiences in violent contexts in El Salvador, Sudan, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, and other places. Anthropologists work among gang members, police, guerillas, and others.

Danny Hoffman, a photojournalist turned anthropologist, has written about his experiences of civil war in Sierra Leone. He recounted an incident at a United Nations (UN) disarmament center when tensions increased as the number of armed combatants grew beyond the ability of the UN monitors to control them. Finally, one of the combatants threw a grenade into the crowd. Fortunately, the grenade did not explode, and Hoffman reported that he was able to “observe … the dynamics of a crowd at an instant of intense violence and confusion and to understand the accounts we later gathered through the prism of our own experience of the event” (2003, p. 12). Monique Skidmore did field research in Burma. She wrote that anthropologists and informants inevitably share experiences and that, in her case, these experiences included being frightened, confused, and disoriented as well as suffering from a general loss of perspective (Skidmore, 2003, p. 6).

Kovats-Bernat, Hoffman, and Skidmore are drawn to the ethnography of violent places for different reasons, but all believe the risks they and their informants take are worthwhile. Skidmore considers herself “an activist by proxy” determined to write against terror (2003, p. 6). Hoffman (2003, pp. 9–10) noted that media conglomerates are increasingly unwilling to support correspondents in out-of-the-way places. Reporters sent to locations of violence are usually there only briefly. They depend on governments for access and thus tend to report news that governments allow. Their reporting generally follows the interests and understandings of the host government. Given this, anthropologists are often among the very few who witness dangerous events and have the depth of knowledge to understand and analyze them. Kovats-Bernat wrote that doing the ethnography of violence can make a critical contribution to anthropological theory. For him, violence is not something that covers and contaminates society; rather, in many cases, it is the stuff of social relationships, inseparable from kinship, market activities, language, and other aspects of culture (2002, p. 217).

Doing fieldwork in dangerous locations raises important ethical questions. Kovats-Bernat wrote that he has often found the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to be “irrelevant, naïve, or insufficient to guide [his] actions” (2002, p. 214). For example, the AAA’s Principles of Professional Responsibility state that “anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare … of those studied” (American Anthropological Association, 1986, p. 1). Kovats-Bernat questions how this can be done under conditions of violence and lawlessness. The AAA statement assumes that the researchers have the knowledge and power to look after the subject of the research, yet in real field situations, the reverse is often true.

In situations of instability, activities basic to research may be fraught with danger. For example, even the most innocuous of field notes may, under certain conditions, mean the difference between life and death for anthropologists and their subjects. Efforts at encrypting notes or locking them up are often futile.

The AAA’s Code of Ethics and Principles of Professional Responsibility urges anthropologists to maintain transparency and avoid deception. However, in violent societies, trying to explain what an anthropologist is and does could, in some cases, lead to arrest—or worse.

Kovats-Bernat wrote that when anthropologists do research under conditions of violence, they invite the possibility of victimization and violence on both themselves and their informants. If anthropologists and informants accept that such research is worthwhile, we must understand the relationship between anthropologists and their subjects in a new way. Our relationship needs to be “one of *mutual responsibility*” [in which] “all participants in the research must … willingly accept the possibility that *any* involvement in the study could result in intimidation, arrest, torture, disappearance, assassination, or a range of other, utterly unforeseeable dangers” (Kovats-Bernat, 2002, p. 214).

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Given the ethical problems of conducting research in violent locations, should anthropologists ever be involved in such research? If not, will their analyses of society be biased in favor of seeing violence as an aberration?
2. The AAA Code of Ethics and Principles of Professional Responsibility makes moral demands on researchers. These may have costs in terms of personal safety and limit the types of information anthropologists may collect. What level of danger should anthropologists be ready to accept to remain true to these professional codes? Are some research topics off limits to anthropologists?
3. Anthropologists who work in violent locations are motivated by intellectual goals and professional advancement. What motivates informants to take the risk of working with anthropologists?

Ethnographic Data and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Boas and his students were interested in describing cultures in their contexts. Because they understood each culture as the product of its unique history, they did not attempt systematic comparison of one culture to another and were not very interested in discovering laws or principles of cultural behavior. However, some level of comparison has always been implicit in anthropology. One goal of the Boasians, for example, was to use their research to cause Europeans and Americans to compare their societies with the societies anthropologists described. Anthropologists hoped that this would help people think about their societies in a new light and help change them for the better.

Historically, British and European anthropologists were more explicitly interested in ethnology, the attempt to find general principles or laws that govern cultural phenomena. They compared societies in the hope of deriving general principles of social organization and behavior. Starting in the 1860s, Herbert Spencer began to develop a systematic way of organizing, tabulating, and correlating information on a large number of societies, a project he called Descriptive Sociology. The American scholar William Graham Sumner, his student Albert Keller, and Keller’s student George Murdock brought Spencer’s ideas about cross-cultural comparison to the United States. In the late 1930s, Murdock and Keller created a large indexed ethnographic database at Yale University. First called the Cross-Cultural Survey, the project was expanded in the late 1940s to include other universities and its name was changed to the **Human Relations Area Files** (HRAF, Figure 2.9).

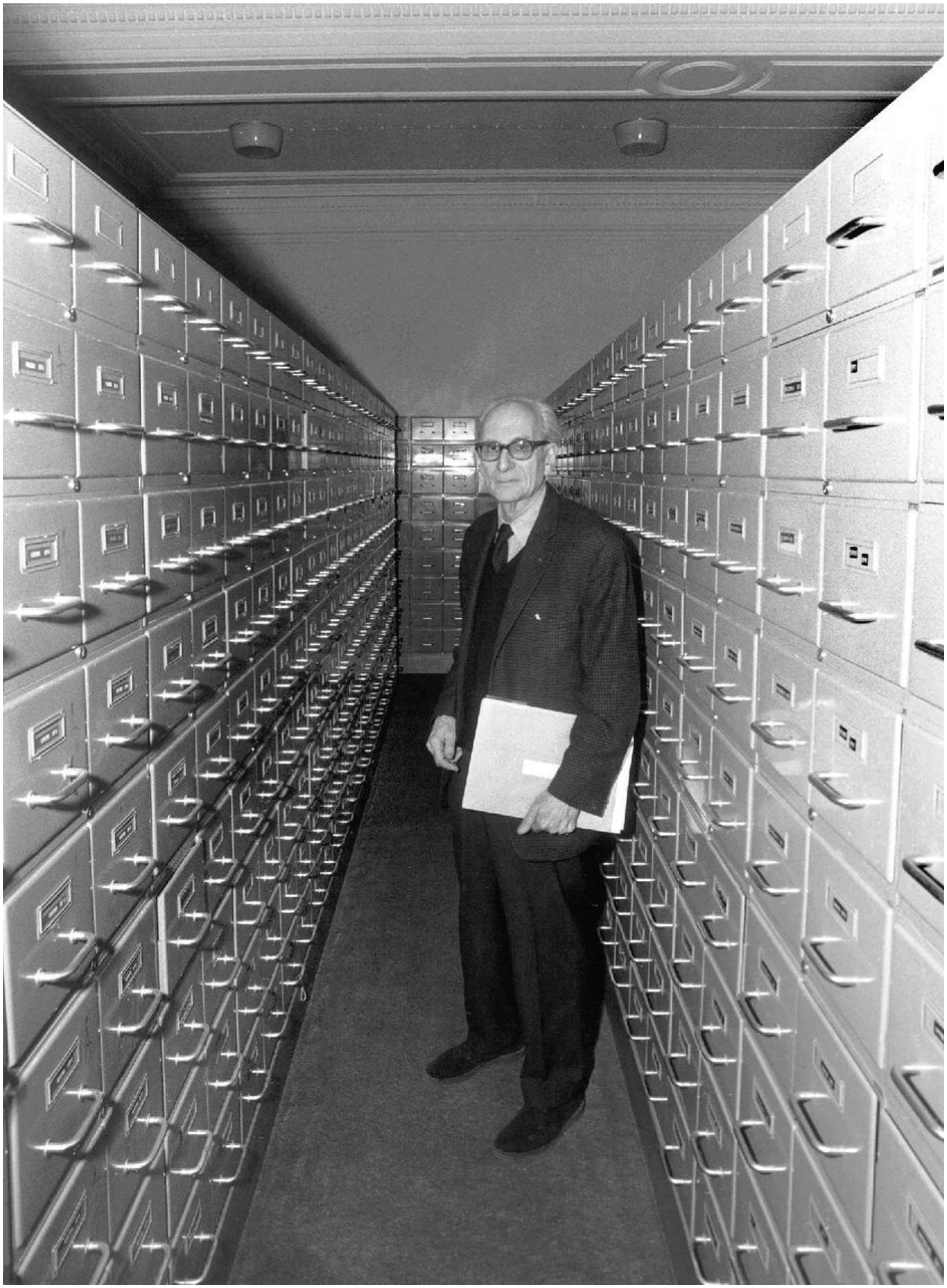

Figure 2.9 Today, the HRAF is available electronically, but in the 1960s, it consisted of tens of thousands of cards

that were filed in cabinets. Here, Claude Lévi-Strauss, a famous 20th-century anthropologist, consults a copy of the HRAF in Paris.

Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

The HRAF is an attempt to facilitate cross-cultural analysis. It provides a single index of ethnographic reports and other sources on 710 numbered subject categories. Some examples of categories are 294 (techniques of clothing manufacture) and 628 (traditional friendships and rivalries within communities). Using the HRAF, researchers can find information on these and many other topics for a wide range of current and historic societies.

The HRAF frequently comes under fire; critics charge that the project takes cultural data out of context and therefore corrupts it. They say that the works indexed in the HRAF were written from different perspectives, for different purposes, and in different eras. Because of this, the indexing is often inconsistent or inappropriate, and therefore analyses based on it are suspect. Despite these problems, work based on the HRAF is often both interesting and insightful. For example, back in the 1950s, the rising divorce rate in the United States was causing alarm. Was divorce truly something new and different—a product of modernity? Murdock used the HRAF to show that almost all societies had some form of divorce and that the divorce rate in the United States (in the 1950s) was lower than average. Thus, his use of the HRAF allowed people to think about divorce in a comparative context. In recent years, the HRAF, now available online and in computer-searchable formats, has been used to consider a wide variety of issues. These include menopause (Sievert, 2006), corporal punishment of children (Ember & Ember, 2005), patterns of cultural evolution (Peregrine et al., 2004), and wealth exchanges at marriages such as dowry payments (Huber et al., 2011).

Another example of cross-cultural research using HRAF examined the practice of bribery in a wide variety of preindustrial societies. Researchers Bo Rothstein and Davide Torsello (2014) used cross-cultural data to analyze the ways people in various nonindustrialized societies conceive of and practice what we, from the perspective of our society, would consider bribery. They particularly wanted to compare societies practicing different subsistence technologies such as foraging, herding, and gardening. They found that bribery was understood as a type of corruption in all the societies they studied. In other words, people almost universally recognize that bribery exists and that it is wrong. However, there is a great deal of variation in people’s expectations about the behavior of others and what is considered a corrupt practice. Things that are considered clear examples of bribery in some societies are not thought of as bribery at all in others. These differences are not related to differences in moral understanding but rather to what members of each society consider private or public property.

Of course, not all cross-cultural research involves the use of the HRAF. Much research is done by a single investigator working in two or more locations or by teams using the same techniques in multiple locations. Some examples include cross-cultural studies of violence (Aijmer & Abbink, 2000), of economics (Durrenberger & Marti, 2006; Henrich et al., 2004), and of language and cognition (Wierzbicka, 2003). Medical anthropology is a particularly rich area of cross-cultural research. The delivery of effective medical services to members of different cultures is a critical area of interest for applied medical anthropologists. Medical anthropologists need to know how people in different cultures understand the causes, symptoms, and cures for different diseases. For example, Carod-Artal and Vázquez-Cabrera (2007) investigated migraine headache symptoms among three different groups of Native Americans: the Tzeltal Maya of Mexico, the Kamayurá of Brazil, and the Uru-Chipaya of Bolivia. They found that all three groups had named syndromes whose symptoms matched migraines. However, the groups’ understandings of the origins of such headaches and how to treat them differed greatly from each other and from our own.

SOME CRITICAL ISSUES IN

ETHNOGRAPHY

In the past several decades, new trends and issues in anthropological research have emerged. These include anthropology and gender, postmodernism, engaged and collaborative anthropology, issues surrounding studying one's own culture, and issues in the ethics of fieldwork and ethnography.

Anthropology and Gender

By the 1960s, the role of fieldwork in anthropology was extremely well established. In addition, the position of women within academic anthropology was relatively good, particularly in comparison to other areas of universities. After 1918, the majority of Franz Boas's students were women. In 1920, he reportedly told a friend that all of his best students were women (Menard, 2019). Some of the women Boas trained went on to become well known in the discipline. Boas students Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston became widely known outside of anthropology as well.

Despite this (or perhaps because of it), the political movements of the 1960s, particularly the civil rights movement and the feminist movement, caused anthropologists to begin thinking about gender and their discipline in new ways. Feminists soon discovered that the presence of some very high-profile women within anthropology did little to counteract the fact that the overwhelming majority of anthropologists were men and that their areas of interest tended to focus on the social roles, activities, and beliefs of men in the societies they studied.

There were several reasons anthropologists had focused on men. First, in many societies, men and women live quite segregated lives. Because they were men, most anthropologists had little access to the lives of women. Second, anthropologists tended to assume that men's activities were political and therefore important, whereas women's activities were domestic and therefore of less importance. Third, in most societies, men's activities were far more public than women's activities. Anthropologists tended to assume that what was public and visible was more important than what was more behind the scenes and less visible. However, this is not always (or even often) the case (Figure 2.10).

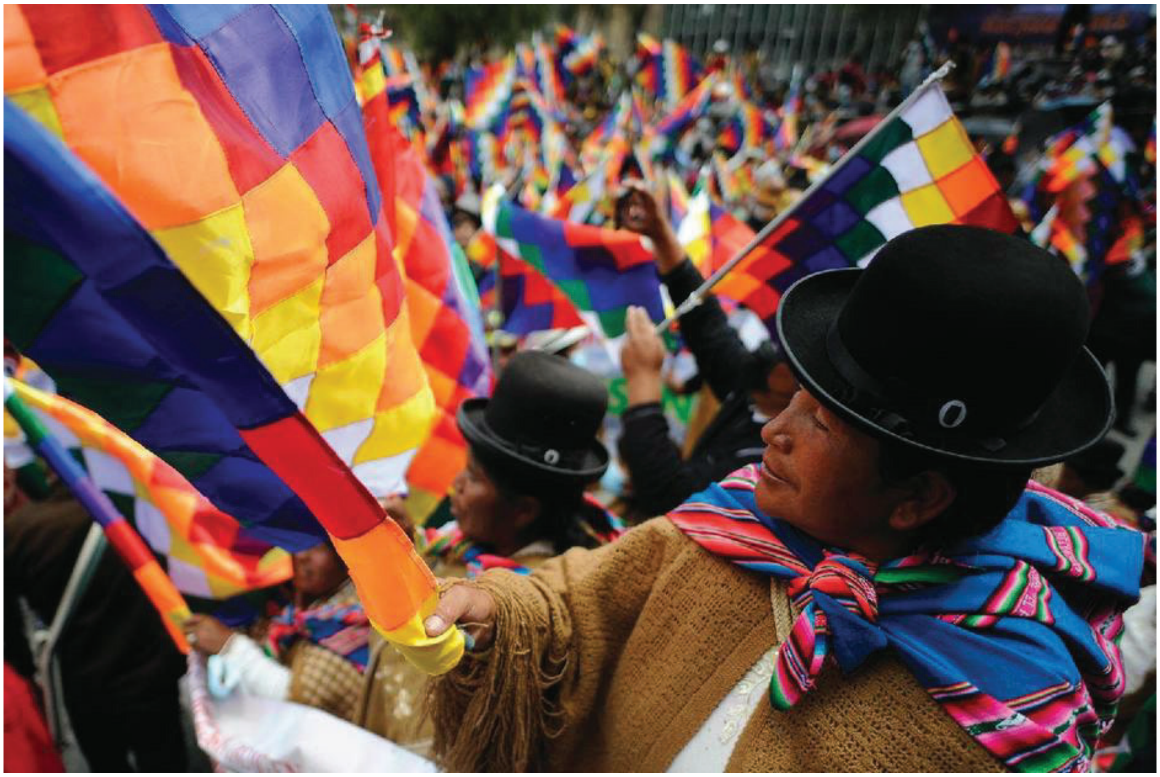

Figure 2.10 Starting in the 1970s, anthropologists began to pay more attention to the daily lives of women. Here, an Aymara indigenous woman waves a Whipala flag—representing native peoples of the Andes—during a pro-government rally in La Paz on October 12, 2021.

JORGE BERNAL/AFP via Getty Images

The result of taking men more seriously than women was systematic bias. Anthropologists had often reported with great detail about men's social and cultural worlds, but they had barely scratched the surface of women's worlds. Furthermore, the assumption frequently implicit in ethnographies that men spoke for all of society often made cultures appear more harmonious and homogeneous than they actually were.

Starting in the 1970s, increasing numbers of women joined university anthropology faculties. By the late 1990s, more than 50% of new anthropology PhDs and more than 40% of all anthropology professors were women (Levine & Wright, 1999). They began paying greater attention to women’s lives.

By the 2000s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) people also found increasing representation on university faculties, leading to the emergence of LGBTQ studies as an academic field. As this happened, anthropologists turned from the study of women to more general considerations of the nature and role of gender in our own and other societies. We will address these issues more fully in Chapter 9.

The Postmodern Critique

Ultimately, the issue of gender in anthropology focused on ways of knowing. Feminists argued persuasively that male anthropologists had missed vital dimensions of society because their gender and their academic interests predisposed them to see certain things and not others. These ideas about perspective dovetailed well with postmodernism, a critique of both natural and social sciences that gained prominence in the 1980s.

Postmodernists hold that all knowledge is influenced by the observer’s culture and social position. They claim fieldworkers cannot discover and describe an objective reality because such a thing does not exist (or exists but cannot be discovered or comprehended by human beings). Instead, postmodernists propose that many partial truths or cultural constructions depend on the frame of reference, power, and history.

Postmodernists urged anthropologists to examine the ways they understood both fieldwork and writing. They demanded that anthropology become sensitive to issues of history and power. Some postmodernists challenged the ethnographer’s role in interpreting culture, claiming that anthropological ethnographies were just one story about experienced reality and the ethnographer’s voice was only one of many possible representations.

During the 1990s, reflection on the nature of fieldwork and the anthropological enterprise became a central focus of writing in anthropology. Works such as *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and *Women Writing Culture* (Behar & Gordon, 1995) encouraged anthropologists to think about how their own status, goals, and the techniques of academic writing shaped the work they produced.

The claims of postmodernists were a subject of intense debate in anthropology. Few anthropologists accepted the postmodern critique in its entirety. However, some of the ideas of postmodernism have become part of the mainstream. The issues of power and voice (who gets to tell a story, who is believed) have become basic aspects of current anthropology. Most ethnographers spend time reflecting critically on their positions as observers, considering the way their background and interests affect their work. And most think far more about the moral and political consequences of their work than they did before the postmodern critique.

Collaborative and Engaged Anthropology

Collaboration, the process of working closely with other people, in a sense describes all anthropological research. **Collaborative anthropologists**, however, highlight this aspect of their work. They consult with their subjects about shaping their studies and writing their reports. They attempt to displace the anthropologist as the sole author representing a group, turning research into a joint process between researcher and subject.

The work of James Spradley (1934–1982) is an important contribution to collaborative, engaged anthropology. His classic ethnography, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (1970), was aimed at encouraging the public to understand and help the homeless alcoholics who were the subject of the book.

Eric Lassiter, an anthropologist inspired by Spradley, has done collaborative work with the Kiowa Indians in Oklahoma. The Kiowa were particularly interested in an ethnography of Kiowa song. They stipulated that it be written so that it could be read and understood by the Kiowa people themselves and that they would be acknowledged for their contributions. Lassiter emphasizes that a critical aspect of his collaboration with the Kiowa was to give the highest priority to representing the Kiowa cultural consultants as they wished to be represented, even if this meant adding or changing information or changing his interpretations. For Lassiter (2004), collaborative ethnography is not just eliciting the comments of the cultural consultants but, even more important, integrating these comments into the text.

Although many anthropologists practice some elements of collaborative anthropology, there are deep problems with the notion that the primary job of anthropologists is to write and say what their consultants want. First, most would probably agree that anthropologists have an obligation to accurately report what people say and do rather than what people want said of them. Further, communities are rarely so homogeneous that they speak with a single voice. Collaborative anthropology may give voice and legitimacy to one element of a community over another. Sometimes, writing what consultants want really means choosing their side in a political contest.

Engaged anthropology moves from the production of texts to political action. Most anthropologists would like their work to further a deep understanding of the human condition. Most also feel a deep sense of connection with the people among whom they work. In many cases, the communities in which anthropologists work are poor, and in some cases, they face political oppression as well. In these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that many anthropologists believe that for anthropology to be relevant and meaningful, it must be involved in political and social efforts to improve the life chances of people in these communities.

Anthropology has a long history of engagement with the societies that anthropologists study, as well as of political activism in anthropologists' own societies. Franz Boas, for example, wrote and spoke frequently on the major political and social issues of his day, particularly race but also education, culture, foreign policy, and violence (McGowan, 2014). He was deeply involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and contributed to its journal, *The Crisis* (Lewis, 2001). Many other anthropologists have followed Boas's example of engagement.

Pauline Wiessner has been a working anthropologist since the early 1970s. Though she trained in archaeology, her interests shifted to working with current-day people during research for her doctoral thesis among the Ju/'hoansi in Botswana and Namibia. In Botswana, she documented the gift-giving and exchange patterns that tied people together and helped them survive in difficult times by allowing them to gain broad access to resources. However, Wiessner's academic interests soon led to a deeper and more active engagement in the community.

As the Ju/'hoansi lost access to their historic lands and were forced to move from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles, Wiessner became concerned with their ability to feed themselves. She established a nonprofit organization, the Tradition and Transition Fund, to help the Ju/'hoansi protect their water sources and gardens from animals and develop new sources of food.

Wiessner's involvement with the Enga of Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been even more dramatic. She began working with the Enga in the 1980s. As with the Ju/'hoansi, her initial interest was in documenting exchange patterns and social networks. However, by the 1990s, it turned to warfare. The Enga, like many PNG groups, had a long history of warfare. Though these wars were serious, they were fought with bow, arrow, and spear, and the number of people killed was small, usually fewer than five. This changed in the 1990s when young Enga men became increasingly impoverished and hopeless but had growing access to weaponry such as M16 rifles. Previously small wars erupted in large-scale violence that claimed hundreds of lives and turned large areas of Enga territory into wastelands.

Wiessner's studies have shown that the violence came to an end after more than a decade as the result of three factors: the exhaustion of the majority of the population, the influence of the Christian church that provided an alternative ideology of peace to the Enga ideology of war, and the presence of a traditional justice system that could be used to mediate disputes (Wiessner & Pupu, 2012; Figure 2.11). Wiessner used the results of her research to lobby both Enga leaders and local government officials to support the use of the traditional justice system in resolving disputes.

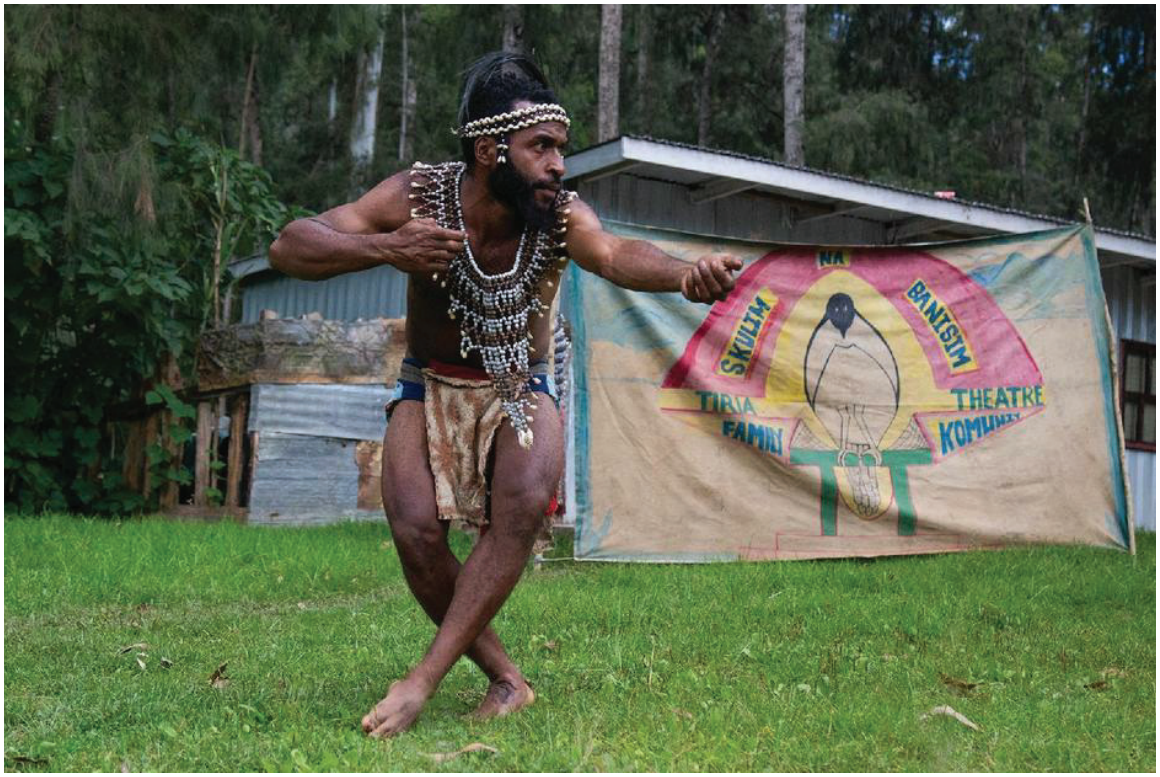

Figure 2.11 In Enga Province, Papua New Guinea, in 2019, Jerry Ak, a performer with the Tiria Theater, performs in a play written to educate people about issues important to them, including armed violence.

Betsy Joles/Getty Images

In the past decade, Wiessner and the Enga Provincial Government have become increasingly concerned with threats to this system. The customary law courts handle 80% to 90% of all Enga disputes. However, the Enga are rapidly losing cultural knowledge. If young people do not know the customs, principles, and values of their own society, these courts will struggle. Beginning in 2005, Wiessner used her own funds along with money she and her Enga colleagues raised to open the Enga Take Anda, a community center and museum located in the capital of Enga Province that both preserves Enga culture and provides a neutral place where members of different groups can come together (Balter, 2010).

More recently, with the support of the Enga Provincial Government, Wiessner has developed a curriculum for schools, Grades 6 to 12, that integrates culture into every subject and encourages students to do cultural research in their own communities. The Cultural Education Program was launched in Enga Province in late 2016 (Yama, 2016).

Studying One’s Own Society

When most people think of anthropologists, they imagine researchers who study others in exotic locations, but since the early 20th century, anthropologists have also studied their own societies. W. Lloyd Warner, Solon T. Kimball, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and Hortense Powdermaker were all American anthropologists who wrote about American culture. Kenyan anthropologist Jomo Kenyatta (Figure 2.12), who was also a freedom fighter and the first president of Kenya, wrote about the Gikuyu of Kenya in 1936, and Chinese anthropologist Francis Hsu wrote extensively on Chinese society.

Figure 2.12 Jomo Kenyatta (1897–1978), the first president of Kenya, was a student of Bronislaw Malinowski and wrote an important book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1965), about his ethnic group, the Kikuyu. He’s seen here addressing a political rally in 1963.

Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images

In recent years, writing about one’s own culture has become even more common. This trend is driven by many factors, including the training of more anthropologists from more different cultures, the rise of interest in ethnicity in the United States and Europe, and the dangers of violence in some areas where anthropologists have studied in the past.

The emphasis on more reflective fieldwork and ethnography affects all anthropologists but particularly those who study their own societies. Traditionally, anthropologists doing fieldwork try hard to learn the culture of the people with whom they are working. In a sense, anthropologists working in their own culture have the opposite problem: They must attempt to see their culture as an outsider might. This is challenging because it is easy to take cultural knowledge for granted. In addition, it may be as difficult to maintain a neutral stand in one's own culture as it is in a different one. As Margaret Mead once noted, it may be easier to remain culturally relativistic when we confront patterns, such as cannibalism or infanticide, in other cultures than when we confront problematic situations such as child neglect, corporate greed, or armed conflict in our own.

Some of the problems and the rewards of studying one's own culture can be seen in Barbara Myerhoff's books and films. Myerhoff contrasted her 1974 work with the Huichol of northern Mexico with her 1978 work among elderly Jewish people. She notes that, in the first case, doing anthropology was "an act of imagination, a means for discovering what one is not and will never be." In the second case, fieldwork was a glimpse into her possible future, as she knew that someday she would be a "little old Jewish lady" (Myerhoff, 1978, pp. 18–19). Her work was a personal way to understand that condition and to contemplate her own future. Tragically, it was a future that never arrived. Myerhoff died of cancer when she was only 49.

More recently, Darren Ranco, an anthropologist and member of the Penobscot American Indian Nation, has considered the problems and issues **native anthropologists** face. Ranco notes that in his earliest anthropological projects, he had trouble trying to do work that seemed anthropological to him and at the same time treat his family and friends in respectful ways. For Ranco, one way out of this dilemma was to try to do work that the Penobscots themselves would find interesting and important. He decided that the criteria for such work included empowering people, involving members of the community, making the finished products of research available to them, and focusing on research that provides direct benefits to the community. Ranco writes that when he considers a project, he asks himself how the project will "endorse, elaborate, or enhance tribal sovereignty" (2006, p. 74), and he will not do the research if he cannot answer the question.

We can all empathize with Ranco's desire to benefit his community. However, we can also see the complications it may create. How can one be sure of the outcome of a project at its beginning? What should anthropologists do if project results turn out not to enhance tribal sovereignty or another predetermined aim? Should any anthropologist refrain from asking questions for fear that the answer might be displeasing? Is enhanced tribal sovereignty always beneficial to all members of the Penobscot Nation? Richard Meyers, an anthropologist who is also a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation, writes that assuming that an anthropologist who is an American Indian necessarily has an insider's understanding of Indians in general or their tribe, in particular, denies the complexities of both Native American societies and the individual anthropologist's personal history, political perspective, theoretical orientation, and socioeconomic class (Meyers, 2019, p. 31). Despite the issues raised by native anthropology, anthropologists should certainly investigate groups to which they belong and may have particularly useful insights into those groups.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Anthropologists and Drug Use

In the 1960s and 1970s, the identification of a drug addict subculture drew anthropologists into the world of substance abuse and addiction (Schensul, 1997). Ethnography was a particularly suitable methodology for studying street drug scenes and their participants.

Most of the time, when researchers try to understand drug use, they turn to medical or sociological models. Medical models treat drug use as a kind of disease and emphasize its physiological and biochemical elements. Most social science models of drug use and distribution treat drug users and sellers as members of a deviant community, separate from the larger population and operating outside of its social networks and cultural norms. Anthropologists, on the other hand, in keeping with their broader holistic perspective, have introduced models that aim at connecting individual drug users and sellers with the larger structural features of the society and economy. For example, in the 1990s, Hamid (1992, 1998, 1990) demonstrated that patterns of drug use, distribution, and drug-related violence are related to the ways that political decisions and economic processes impact neighborhoods, families, and kinship networks.

Philippe Bourgois has been one of anthropology’s most consistent and effective drug researchers. His 1995 work *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* focused on the complex relationship between deindustrialization, male identity, race, and ethnicity in East Harlem. More recently, Bourgois has focused on drug addiction and homelessness. His 2009 book *Righteous Dopefiend*, done in collaboration with photographer Jeff Schonberg, is based on 9 years of ethnographic work with homeless heroin injectors in San Francisco. During their fieldwork, Bourgois and Schonberg shared the lives of several dozen such individuals, often spending nights with them under freeways or in marginal areas.

Bourgois and Schonberg describe their fieldwork as taking place in a gray zone, a term they borrow from Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi. By gray zone, Bourgois and Schonberg mean that the structures of society and the facts of addiction “create a morally ambiguous space that blurs the lines between victims and perpetrators” (2009, p. 20). Although heroin injectors are certainly responsible for their decisions, these decisions take place in the context of personal history, governmental policies, institutional contexts, and a social hierarchy that all have profound and almost always deleterious impacts on their lives.

Bourgois and Schonberg had to learn to survive and do productive fieldwork. They had to balance their feelings of being manipulated and victimized by the constant demands of their informants with the reality that gifts of money, food, and goods such as blankets were critical to defining friendship and community among homeless addicts. They were witnesses to innumerable illegal acts, from drug dealing and consumption to petty theft and violence. The people who they worked among were both perpetrators and victims of these acts. Bourgois and Schonberg had to carefully and constantly consider their obligations to the community they studied, to the broader community, and to the discipline of anthropology.

Bourgois and Schonberg’s work provides an intimate and detailed account of the lives of homeless addicts. They explored topics including love and sex among addicts, addicts’ relationships with their families, the strategies they use to survive on the streets, the ways they interact with health care providers and treatment programs, and, sometimes, the ways they die. Schonberg’s gritty black-and-white photos give readers an almost visceral sense of life on the streets.

One focus of *Righteous Dopefiend* is the way that race affects addict behavior. In a world in which everyone is self-destructive, white addicts tend to be even more self-destructive than Black addicts. They are less likely to have contact and support from their families, are often clinically depressed, and more frequently inject in ways that lead to abscesses and infection than do Black addicts.

Bourgois and Schonberg’s work shows why many of the programs designed to help the homeless must fail. Such programs are often designed with good intentions but do not take close account of the actual lives of addicts. For example, health workers constantly advised addicts never to share injection paraphernalia. However, the sharing of drugs and equipment is basic to the survival of addicts on the streets. Early in their fieldwork, Bourgois and Schonberg participated in a needle exchange program, providing boxes of 100 needles to some of the people they worked with. This was extremely effective because the addicts who received the needles sold them for small amounts of money, flooding the area with clean needles. However, it also illustrates the institutional problems associated with such programs. Needle exchange activists were unhappy that free needles were resold. And many conservatives viewed providing needles as encouraging drug use. Ultimately, the needles were confiscated in police sweeps because possession of a large number of needles is illegal.

Bourgois and Schonberg's work underscores the strength of anthropological fieldwork. The understandings of the lives of homeless addicts that they presented can only be achieved through long-term study, during which anthropologists become deeply involved in the communities they study. Such understandings can lead to suggestions that can greatly improve the effectiveness of programs designed to help addicts, and Bourgois and Schonberg provided numerous such suggestions. However, their work also demonstrates that the problems of homeless addicts are symptomatic of far larger issues, such as economic change, cultural understandings about drugs, addiction, homelessness, race, and inequality. These are political, economic, and cultural structures that are not easily changed.

ETHICS IN FIELDWORK AND ANTHROPOLOGY

As questions about native anthropologists show, ethical issues frequently arise in anthropological research. Anthropologists have obligations to the standards of their discipline, to their sponsors, to their own and their host governments, and to the public. However, their first ethical obligations are usually to the people they study and to the people with whom they work. Under some circumstances, these obligations can be more important than the goal of seeking new knowledge.

According to the American Anthropological Association’s Principles of Professional Responsibility (AAA, 2012), anthropologists must grapple with the difficulties of complex rights, responsibilities, and involvements. They must avoid research that harms their subjects’ dignity or bodily and material well-being. They must weigh the potential consequences of their research and consider the possibility that the potential for harm might be more important than the new knowledge they gain. Anthropologists have obligations to be open and honest and to inform their participants and collaborators about their work.

Anthropologists must obtain the **informed consent** of study participants. This requires anthropologists to take part in ongoing and dynamic discussions with their consultants about the nature of the study as well as the risks and benefits of participation in it (Clark & Kingsolver, n.d.). Informed consent means that people involved in an anthropological study should understand how their participation is likely to affect them. Individuals must always be free to decide whether they will participate in the study.

Anthropologists also have obligations to the discipline of anthropology. Two of these obligations seem both important and problematic. First, anthropologists should conduct themselves in ways that do not endanger the research prospects or lives of other anthropologists. Anthropologists who violate the norms and ethics of the communities where they work make it unlikely that those communities will accept other anthropologists in the future. Anthropologists who become involved and identified with governments, military forces, or political platforms may endanger not only their own lives but also the work and lives of others. For example, if people know that some anthropologists are working for an army or an intelligence-gathering agency, they may suspect that all are.

Second, many anthropologists believe that the primary purpose of research is to add to the general store of anthropological knowledge.

Thus, they argue that anthropologists are obligated to publish their findings in forms that are available to other anthropologists and the public. Publishing usually involves a review of the work by other anthropologists, and this helps ensure the validity and quality of research. Anthropologists acknowledge that certain forms of secrecy are acceptable and, on occasion, even required. For example, anthropologists often protect the communities and individuals with whom they work by not revealing the precise location of their research and by using pseudonyms for individuals they discuss.

The obligations to protect other anthropologists and to publish research findings both pose dilemmas. The engaged anthropologists described earlier believe that anthropologists must work for the communities they study. However, this purpose may make it impossible for future anthropologists to work at all. For example, governments may not grant anthropologists research visas, and organizations may not allow research if they believe anthropologists will promote political action against them.

Applied anthropologists wish to work for businesses and governments. Often anthropological findings have the greatest value for these entities when they are kept secret. There may be very few jobs available for applied anthropologists who insist on the right to publish all the results of their research.

Numerous projects have tested the boundaries of ethics in anthropology. One of the best known of these was “Project Camelot,” a mid-1960s attempt by the Army and Department of Defense to enlist anthropologists to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. Project Camelot’s avowed purpose was to create a model for predicting civil wars, but it was also implicated in fighting insurgency movements and propping up friendly governments (Horowitz, 1967). When Project Camelot was made public in 1965, the United States had recently invaded the Dominican Republic and was escalating the Vietnam War. Project Camelot created controversy both inside and outside of anthropology. In countries where anthropologists worked, people began to see them as spies whose presence presaged a U.S. invasion. At American

Anthropological Association meetings, Project Camelot led to vitriolic debate; members raised concerns about the integrity of research, the safety of anthropologists in the field, and the purposes to which anthropological knowledge might be put. These concerns eventually led to the issuing of the first official statement on anthropological ethics in 1971.

Concerns like those raised by Project Camelot have recurred over the engagement of some anthropologists with the U.S. military. Anthropologists and other social scientists are involved with the military in two ways. They have worked at military colleges and bases providing training for officers or analyses of the culture of the military itself. Anthropologists and other social scientists have occasionally worked on the ground collecting data in zones of active conflict. Between 2007 and 2014, these researchers were involved with a program called Human Terrain System (HTS). HTS members collected information on village social structure and other aspects of culture. They also took part in the interrogation of detainees (Weinberger, 2011; Figure 2.13). Several social scientists working in this program were killed.

Figure 2.13 Anthropologists and other social scientists who work for the military raise important ethical concerns. Here, Ted Callahan talks to Afghan villagers in 2009. Callahan spent 18 months working for the U.S. Army’s Human Terrain System (HTS) program. The HTS program ended in 2014.

Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images

The use of anthropologists in military training is by far the less controversial of these two forms of engagement. Anthropologists who favor this argue that such anthropologists generally present publicly available information. Military personnel are free to enroll in university anthropology courses. Presenting such courses as part of military training is no different. Others argue that this engagement is wrong. David Price (2009) notes that at least in theory, anthropologists in universities seek knowledge for its own sake, whereas those working for the military seek it for victory, security, and defense. The use of anthropologists as part of HTS teams on the ground raises deeper problems. The effectiveness of HTS was the subject of intense dispute. Some argued that it saved both troops and civilians in Afghanistan (Fondacaro & McFate, 2008), but these claims were refuted by others (Price, 2010). Whether or not the military’s use of anthropologists is effective, most anthropologists find it deeply troubling. It is difficult to see how many of anthropology’s ethical requirements can be met under conditions of warfare (Forte, 2011). How, for example, are participants to give coercion-free consent while subject to military occupation? How can anthropologists honestly inform participants about the ways the research data will be used and are likely to affect them? Can anthropologists working under such circumstances ensure, within reason, that the information they supply will not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work? Isn’t the point of their work sometimes just the opposite of that? What of anthropologists’ obligations to publish their research? Aren’t the results of this sort of research necessarily secret? Historically, anthropologists have been concerned with protecting the rights and safety of the people they study. The primary concern of anthropologists working in projects like HTS must be the safety, security, and goals of their employers instead.

Given all of the problems with HTS, it is probably safe to say that a strong majority of anthropologists oppose this use of anthropology. Anthropologists voiced opposition to HTS and other forms of involvement with the military at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in 2007 and 2008, and the HTS program was shut down by the military in 2014. However, the issue is likely to reappear in the coming years.

Ultimately, ethical behavior is the responsibility of each anthropologist. The members of the AAA are supposed to subscribe to its code of ethics. However, not all anthropologists are subject to the AAA or university-based institutional review boards. Lawyers who behave unethically can be disbarred. Doctors can have their medical licenses revoked. In both cases, they violate laws and can be punished if they continue to practice. There is no comparable sanction for anthropologists (and, indeed, for the members of most disciplines). Therefore, there will always be a great diversity of anthropological practice.

Conclusion: New Roles for Ethnographers

Although there have been native anthropologists for a long time, until the 1970s, the prevailing model of fieldwork was a European or North American ethnographer visiting a relatively isolated and bounded society and then reporting on that society to other Europeans and North Americans. In the past several decades, this model has changed. Though societies have always been interconnected, inexpensive communication, relatively cheap airfare, and migrations have greatly increased the scale of these connections. These forces have altered the world and the nature of the anthropologist’s job. Whether they work in cities, villages, or with tribal groups, anthropologists nowadays must take regional and global connections into account. Research may mean following consultants from villages to their workplaces in cities, collecting genealogies that spread over countries or even continents, and following cash and information flows around the world.

In addition to expanding the research site, contemporary ethnographers must often use techniques such as questionnaires, social surveys, archival material, government documents, and court records in addition to participant observation. The deep connections among cultures and the global movement of individuals mean that we must constantly reevaluate the nature of the cultures we are studying, their geographical spread, their economic and political position, and their relation to one another.

Today, not only are native anthropologists much more common, but the people anthropologists study also generally have a far greater knowledge of the world than they did in earlier times. They are likely to understand what anthropology is and what anthropologists do, something not true in the past. In some cases, this awareness has led to difficulties as people struggle over the question of who has the right to speak for a group. In other cases, people from the groups that anthropologists have described have publicly taken issue with researchers' analyses. For example, in the early 2000s, a fierce controversy broke out over anthropological descriptions of the Yanomami, a well-known Amazonian group. Had their primary ethnographer, Napoleon Chagnon, portrayed them accurately? Was the research team that he was part of responsible for spreading disease and decimating Yanomami villages? Anthropologists, journalists, and Yanomami tribe members debated these questions at meetings and in the popular press (for a review of the debate, see Borofsky, 2005).

Despite controversies, for the most part, natives' increased knowledge of the outside world has resulted in closer relations among anthropologists and the people they study, as well as more accurate ethnography. Ethnographic data are often useful to members of a society. Sometimes they serve as the basis for the revitalization of cultural identities that have been nearly effaced by Western impact

(Feinberg, 1994). Sometimes they play important roles in establishing group claims to authenticity and are useful in local political and economic contexts. For example, when Kathleen Adams (1995) carried out her fieldwork among the Toraja of Sulawesi, Indonesia, she became a featured event on tourist itineraries in the region. Toraja tour guides led their groups to the home of her host, both validating his importance in the village and bolstering the tourists' experience of the Toraja as a group sufficiently authentic and important to be studied by anthropologists.

In the past, anthropologists sometimes worried about their subject disappearing. They argued that the main thing anthropology was designed to study was small-scale, relatively isolated, "primitive" societies. They worried that, as economic development spread around the world, such societies would go out of existence, and anthropology, as a field, would essentially be finished. In a small sense, they were right, but in the larger sense, they were wrong. Any anthropologist today looking to study a society untouched by the outside world would be out of luck. No such societies have existed for a long time. On the other hand, the forces of globalization have produced an increase in diversity as well as homogeneity. Economics, politics, and social forces bring groups of people together in new ways, in conflict, and cooperation. New cultural forms are created and old ones modified. Human cultural diversity, imagination, and adaptability show no signs of dying out, so anthropologists will always have material to study. Wherever human cultures exist and however they change, anthropologists will be there, devising means to study, understand, and think about them.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PANDEMICS AND OTHER DISASTERS

Plagues and pandemics have had profound effects on world history. The Justinian plague of the mid-500s CE was probably implicated in the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire. The bubonic plague of the mid-1300s hastened the collapse of feudalism in Europe and led to broad social and economic changes. In the 1500s, as we discuss in Chapter 15, tens of millions in the Americas died from diseases brought by Europeans, and the world was forever changed. Pandemics and plagues have continued to the present day. The influenza pandemic of 1918 is believed to have infected about one third of the world's population and caused at least 50 million deaths (Jordan et al., 2019). In 1957, an influenza epidemic killed about 1.1 million worldwide, including more than 110,000 in the United States. Worldwide, another million died in a similar epidemic in 1968, and as many as half a million in the H1N1 epidemic of 2009 (CDC, 2019). Cholera broke out in Haiti shortly after the 2010 earthquake, and by that fall, about 800,000 Haitians had been sickened and 10,000 died, a huge toll in a population of 11 million (CDC, n.d.).

Anthropologist Carlo Caduff (2015) analyzes the discourse around the inevitability of pandemics as a kind of prophecy. Scientists speak about the future. They speak with authority, arguing that the days of pandemic are closer than people think. However, they also worry that it's difficult to maintain public vigilance when terrible events do not occur. Then public interest wanes and funding fails. This seems to be what happened in the United States and Europe. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, a series of threats led to relatively high levels of preparedness. However, as the epidemics failed to have deep effects, interest declined, especially after the rise of populist regimes in the mid-2010s. These changes, as well as initial denial of the disease's severity, crippled the responses of many nations, particularly the United States and Western Europe, when the COVID-19 epidemic began in late 2019. As of July 1, 2022, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recorded more than 87 million COVID-19 cases in the United States and more than 1 million deaths (CDC, n.d.). This is almost certainly a substantial undercount. A study published in April 2022 showed that almost 60% of the U.S. population and 75% of U.S. children showed seriological (blood-based) evidence of having been exposed to COVID-19 (Clarke et al., 2022). Globally, there have been more than a half a billion cases and more than 6.3 million deaths

(World Health Organization, n.d.). This, too, most likely severely underrepresents the true toll of the disease.

Now, 3 years into the pandemic, we can see some of the effects of the disease on our own culture and others throughout the world. For many people, the pandemic changed the nature of work, of school, and of daily life. Some of these changes, such as the increasing prevalence of remote work and school, will be very long lasting. The pandemic is implicated in many other social changes. It has been one element increasing political, cultural, and social polarization in the United States and many other countries. It is a critical reason for both the economic boom of 2021 and the inflation and economic downturn that followed it. These, in turn, will have strong political effects.

Anthropologist Monica Schoch-Spana has studied community responses to disasters. Schoch-Spana notes that governments often assume that in times of disaster, their principal job will be maintaining public order. However, when communication from public officials is honest and accurate, scenes of chaos are rare.

With other anthropologists, Schoch-Spana held engagement forums in Maryland and Texas to explore community values in the distribution of medical resources, such as ventilators, that might be scarce in an emergency (Schoch-Spana et al., 2021). She found that people did have concerns over the fairness of procedures for allocating these resources. They were afraid of biased decisions by practitioners and worried that some people would try to game the system. Authorities need to address these concerns directly and be transparent about how such decisions are to be made. Schoch-Spana’s other suggestions for leaders and authorities include speaking in human terms rather than in statistics, empathizing with people who must make extraordinarily difficult decisions, giving people concrete things that they can do to help, and setting realistic expectations. Messages to the public must be honest, consistent, and frequent. Without this, health care decisions may seem unfair.

Schoch-Spana points out that preventing the spread of disease, treating those who become ill, and dealing with the blows to the economy are only part of the task of coping with a pandemic such as COVID-19. Pandemics impose extraordinary psychic burdens on virtually everyone. Stressors include isolation, loss of income, fear that family members and friends will contract disease, lack of access to the medical and psychological services people are accustomed to receiving, and the enormous pressures placed on care providers of all types. We must not only secure the best medical treatment of the disease itself but also make sure that people have access to both immediate and long-term mental health support.

Key Questions

1. Pandemics have often been critical events in world history. How do you think the world will change as a result of COVID-19?
2. Now that we have all experienced a pandemic, how do you think governments will deal with future pandemic threats?
3. Schoch-Spana points out that communication from authorities during disasters such as pandemics needs to be frequent, consistent, and honest. To what degree did authorities achieve this goal during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SUMMARY

1. When did anthropology begin as an academic discipline and what were the methods and goals of early anthropologists? Anthropology began in the 19th century. In that era, anthropologists were compilers of data rather than fieldworkers. Their goal was to describe and document the evolutionary history of human society. There were numerous problems with their data and methods.

2. Who was Franz Boas, and what role did he play in U.S. anthropology? Franz Boas was a German-trained social scientist. In the United States, Franz Boas established a style of anthropology that rejected evolutionism. Boas insisted that anthropologists collect data through objectively oriented fieldwork. He argued that cultures were

the result of their own history and could not be compared to one another, a position called cultural relativism.

3. Who was Bronislaw Malinowski, and what role did he play in anthropology? Bronislaw Malinowski was a British-trained anthropologist whose approach and fieldwork were critical in establishing anthropology in Britain. Malinowski emphasized participant observation and the rationality of native practices. Although the focus of Malinowski’s work was different from Boas’s, both promoted fieldwork by professional anthropologists and both saw members of other cultures as fully rational and worthy of respect.

4. How is research in anthropology today different from research in the early 20th century? Almost all anthropologists today do fieldwork, and many continue to work in small communities. Most focus on answering specific questions rather than describing entire societies. Anthropological techniques include participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, and mapping.

5. What is participant observation? Participant observation is the technique of gathering data on human cultures by living among the people, observing their social interaction on an ongoing daily basis, and participating as much as possible in their lives. This intensive field experience is the methodological hallmark of cultural anthropology.

6. What are the emic and etic perspectives? Anthropological research styles are sometimes characterized as either emic or etic. Anthropologists using the emic perspective seek to understand how cultures look from the inside. Their goal is to enable cultural outsiders to gain a sense of what it might be like to be a member of the culture. Anthropologists using an etic perspective seek to derive principles or rules that explain the behavior of members of a culture. Etic research is judged by the usefulness of the hypotheses it generates and the degree to which it accurately describes behavior, not by whether members of the culture studied agree with its conclusions.

7. What is the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) database, and what is it used for? The HRAF is a database of information on more

than 300 cultures. It is used for cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural researchers attempt to compare cultures to derive laws or principles that can be applied to many different cultures.

8. How does Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg’s work among drug users demonstrate the value and limits of anthropological fieldwork? By living with homeless drug abusers, Bourgois and Schonberg gained insights into the addicts’ lives that led to concrete suggestions about ways to improve them. However, it also showed that the problems of the addicts were enmeshed with larger issues of race, inequality, and homelessness that are extremely difficult to address.

9. What is feminist anthropology, and what is its importance in the development of anthropological thinking? Most anthropology before the late 1960s focused on men’s lives. In the 1960s, feminist anthropology was a movement to change the focus of anthropology to include all people and to increase the number of female anthropologists. Feminist anthropology began a trend of thinking about both the structure of anthropology as a discipline and the role of gender, power, and voice in society.

10. What is postmodernism, and how did it affect anthropology? Postmodernism is a theoretical position focusing on the role of power and voice in shaping society and research. Postmodernists urged anthropologists to become more sensitive to these issues. Postmodernists also held that the objective world was unknowable and anthropologists’ voices uncertain. Postmodernism created intense debate within anthropology but ultimately enriched ethnography.

11. What are engaged and collaborative anthropology? Engaged and collaborative anthropology place special emphasis on some of the issues raised by postmodernism. Collaborative anthropologists take great pains to involve members of the groups they study in the production of ethnographic knowledge. Engaged anthropologists place special emphasis on the political dimensions of their work and combine fieldwork with political and social activism.

12. What are native anthropologists, and what special advantages and problems do they have? Native anthropologists are those who study their own society. Native anthropologists may have advantages of access and rapport. However, in some cases, they also experience burdens more intensely, such as whether to expose aspects of the culture that may be received unfavorably by outsiders.

13. What are some ethical dilemmas that anthropologists face? Anthropological ethics require protecting the dignity, privacy, and anonymity of the people one studies as well as obtaining their informed consent. However, it is not clear that this can be accomplished in all cases. In places of violence and instability, anthropologists may not have the knowledge or power necessary to provide such protection. The use of anthropologists in the military presents an extremely difficult ethical issue for the profession.

14. What is the importance of anthropology in an increasingly globalized world? Anthropologists are increasingly enmeshed in a global society. Those they study are rarely isolated and are often quite knowledgeable about anthropology. Anthropological knowledge is often important in the ways people understand their identity and, as such, is increasingly political.

15. How have anthropologists analyzed pandemics and other disasters? Anthropologists have shown the profound ways that pandemics and other disasters have shaped societies. Anthropological research provides information on the issues that are likely to arise during emergencies and ways to deal with them successfully.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Describe some of the key issues surrounding the development of anthropology in the 19th and early 20th centuries. What motivated early anthropologists?

2. Participant observation is the key research technique of anthropology. How is it done? What are its advantages? What problems and issues face researchers using participant observation?
3. Summarize the key challenges that feminism and postmodernism posed for anthropology and the ways in which the discipline responded.
4. To what degree do you think anthropologists should be involved in promoting the welfare of the people with whom they work? What are the advantages and disadvantages of engaged and collaborative anthropology?
5. Should anthropologists work for governments, corporations, and the military? If you believe that anthropologists should be willing to work for these entities, are there limits on the kinds of research they should do or the kinds of information they should be willing to give their employers?

Key Terms

collaborative anthropologists (p. 43)

culture shock (p. 35)

engaged anthropology (p. 44)

fieldwork (p. 32)

Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) (p. 40)

informant (respondent, interlocutor, consultant) (p. 36)

informed consent (p. 48)

institutional review board (IRB) (p. 34)

native anthropologists (p. 46)

postmodernists (p. 43)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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A globe labeled Papua New Guinea placed over a map depicting Palau, Pacific Ocean, Indonesia, Solomon Islands, Bismarck Sea, Arafura Sea, Trobriand Islands, Port Moresby, Coral Sea, and Australia. Below it is a map depicting Solomon Sea, and parts of Trobriand Islands. Trobriand Islands include Simlindon I, Nulima I, Kibu I, Kuiawa I, Labi I, Munuwata I, Nubiam I, Muwo I, Kadai I, Boimaga I, Buriwadi I, Tuma I, Kitava I, Vakuta I, Kaileuna I, and Kiriwina I.

3 THE IDEA OF CULTURE

Homecoming mums in Texas. In Texas, homecoming mums started as corsages made of chrysanthemums but have become elaborate paper and plastic decorations that showcase the interests, personalities, and aspirations of their creators. Mums frequently include decorations such as teddy bears and bells. They can be extremely expensive. Homecoming mums are part of Texan culture that is not shared with most other people in the United States.

REUTERS/Alamy Stock Photo

Learning Objectives

After you have read this chapter, you will be able to:

3.1 List the major characteristics of culture.

3.2 Describe how culture is learned throughout life.

3.3 Explain the relationship between culture and how people use symbols, rituals, and events to classify their world and create meaning.

3.4 Describe the roles of conflict and consensus in culture change.

3.5 Assess whether there is an American culture and its characteristics.

Culture is one of the most basic characteristics of human society. Although it is not easy to define precisely, almost everything humans perceive, know, think, value, feel, and do, in short, practically everything that makes us human, is based in culture. Even things like sex or sleep that strike us as natural are often deeply patterned by culture.

Much of culture consists of the aspects of our lives that go without saying, and this sometimes makes culture difficult to think about. Consider clothing and speech. Almost all college students in the United States wear broadly similar clothes. On a normal day, you would probably not go to class wearing a tuxedo or evening gown. You would not go dressed as Darth Vader or wearing a skimpy bathing suit. If a professor asked you a question about mathematics, you probably wouldn’t answer by barking like a dog and tap dancing (though, importantly, a first-grader might). Not only are you very unlikely to do these things, in all probability, but you would never consider doing them. Because we learned the boundaries of dress and speech in a classroom setting so early and have practiced them so long, violating them simply does not occur to most adults. These boundaries are part of what the theorist Pierre Bourdieu has called **habitus**—the often taken-for-granted ways of acting that are acquired through both individual and social experience.

Culture is so basic to human society that it is difficult to imagine what human life would be without it. We might come close, however, by considering autism. Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by difficulties in both verbal and nonverbal communication, impairment of social interaction, and a host of other symptoms. It is generally diagnosed in children between the ages of 18 and 36 months. Autism may affect as many as 1 in 150 children. As a result, all of us likely have some experience with autism. Some of us are on the autistic spectrum ourselves. Others have siblings, friends, or acquaintances who are.

Autism can occur in many different levels of severity. Some with profound autism are silent and withdrawn. However, many others have mild to moderate forms of the syndrome, and they can master language and learn to participate in society. However, while most of us pick up the culture of our communities simply by being around other group members, people with autism must make much more explicit and conscious attempts to understand and participate in the patterns of life around them.

Some people with autism have exceptional intellectual skills; Dr. Temple Grandin (Figure 3.1) is among the best known of these individuals. Dr. Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University, has written extensively about her experience of autism and how she has learned to interact with other people. As Grandin and psychologist Oliver Sacks explain it, people with autism think in extremely concrete terms and have profound difficulty understanding social conventions and unwritten cultural rules of every sort. Writing about her, Sacks said that Grandin lacks “the implicit knowledge, which every normal person accumulates and generates throughout life on the basis of experience and encounters with others.” As a result, she must “‘compute’ others’ intentions and states of mind, to try to make … explicit, what for the rest of us is second nature” (Sacks, 1995, p. 270). In other words, although people with autism certainly don’t lack culture, they seem to learn it and understand it differently than those without the disorder. Thinking about their experiences can give us insight into the nature of culture.

Figure 3.1 Dr. Temple Grandin is one of the best- known people with autism. Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University, has written extensively about her experience of autism and how she has learned to interact with other people.

Leonard Ortiz/Digital First Media/Orange County Register via Getty Images

Grandin has often described herself as an “anthropologist on Mars.” To her, being in human society is like being on a different planet. She is an outsider confronted with a wholly different way of life. She can observe what people do, but their actions make no sense. She has no intuitive feel for the things going on around her. In other words, for Grandin, other people have this thing that we call “culture.” Her experience of culture seems enormously different from that of others. She must continually reassess and think about (and sometimes say) exactly those things that go without saying.

Grandin has been very successful because she has learned to imitate culture; that is, she has learned when she needs to say certain things and perform certain actions to appear normal. But, despite her success, Sacks reports that Grandin does not think she understands others (Sacks, 1995, p. 286). In describing this condition, the classical music critic Tim Page, who also has mild to moderate autism, wrote, “I am left with the melancholy sensation that my life has been spent in a perpetual state of parallel play, alongside, but distinctly apart from, the rest of humanity” (2007, p. 36).

Accounts of individuals with autism such as Grandin and Page make it clear that if we do not internalize the assumptions, constraints, and patterns imposed by culture, it is extraordinarily difficult to express our human qualities and abilities. But what is culture?

DEFINING CULTURE

In 1873, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor introduced the concept of culture as an explanation for the differences among human societies. Tylor defined culture as the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities acquired [learned] by man as a member of society” (1920, p. 1), and he defined anthropology as the scientific study of human culture.

Today, anthropologists generally agree that all cultures share, to some degree, the following six characteristics:

1. Cultures are made up of learned behaviors. People are not born knowing their culture. Learning culture is a continuous process. We start learning our culture the day we are born, and we are still learning things at the time of our death.
2. Cultures all involve symbols. A **symbol** is simply something that stands for something else. People manipulate, invent, and change symbols. All cultures have language, which is a complex symbolic system. Using symbols helps people create meaning, including beliefs about the way the world should be. However,

many different such beliefs are likely to be found within any culture.

3. Cultures are to some degree patterned and integrated. That is, the elements of culture stand in some logical relationship to one another. However, as we will see later in the chapter, the degree of coordination among elements of culture is hotly disputed.
4. Cultures are in some way shared by members of a group. Every human being has an individual personality. Studying that is the domain of psychology. Each person must also interact with others and thus must share a framework of meaning and behavior with them. Studying that framework is the domain of cultural anthropology.
5. Cultures are in some way adaptive. That is, cultures contain information about how to survive in the world. However, cultures also contain much that is maladaptive.
6. All cultures are subject to change. Whether propelled by its internal dynamic or acted upon by outside forces, no culture remains static. However, the speed with which cultures change may vary enormously from place to place and time to time.

Based on this list, we define culture as the learned, symbolic, at least partially adaptive, and ever-changing patterns of behavior and meaning shared by members of a group.

Although anthropologists agree on the basic characteristics of culture, they disagree on their relative importance, how to study them, and, indeed, on the goals of anthropology itself. For example, some anthropologists are deeply concerned with observable behavior. Other anthropologists wish to comprehend how members of a culture understand the world. Some anthropologists hope to find general laws of human culture. Others are more concerned with describing specific aspects of particular cultures. These disagreements reflect different theoretical perspectives within anthropology, different anthropological theories.

For our purposes, an **anthropological theory** is a set of propositions about which aspects of culture are critical, how these aspects should be studied, and what the goal of studying them should be. Although those who hold different theoretical perspectives may insist that there is a right way and a wrong way to do anthropology, we suggest that theoretical perspectives are more like different windows through which one can view culture. Just as the view changes as one moves from window to window of a building, so the anthropologist's understanding of society changes as they move from one understanding of culture to another. And just as two windows may have views that overlap or views that show totally different scenes, definitions of culture may overlap or reveal different aspects of society. Some of the major theoretical perspectives in anthropology are summarized in Table 3.1. More detailed summaries of these schools and lists of key works within them are found in the Appendix to this book.

Table 3.1 Major Theoretical Perspectives in Anthropology

Theory Name	**Understanding of Culture**	**Some Critical Thinkers**
Nineteenth-Century Evolutionism	All societies progress, sharing a single universal culture that they possess in different amounts.	E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) L. H. Morgan (1818–1881)
Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Sociology	Groups of people share sets of symbols and practices that bind them into societies.	Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) Max Weber (1864–1920)

The American Boasian Tradition	Cultures are the result of shared histories and must be described holistically.	Franz Boas (1858–1942) Margaret Mead (1901–1978)
Functionalism	Social practices support societies' structure or fill the needs of its members.	A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942)
Culture and Personality	Culture is personality writ large. It is shaped by psychological forces.	Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) Edward Sapir (1884–1939)
Cultural Ecology and Neo-evolutionism	Culture is the way human beings adapt to the environment and make their lives secure.	Julian Steward (1902–1972)

		Leslie White (1900–1975)
Ecological Materialism	Physical and economic causes give rise to cultures and explain changes within them.	Morton Fried (1923–1986) Marvin Harris (1927–2001)
Cognitive Anthropology	Culture is a mental template that determines how members of a society understand their worlds.	Ward Goodenough (1919–2013) James Spradley (1933–1982)
Structural Anthropology	Universal patterns in human cultures can be discovered through the analysis of myths. These patterns continue to be active in current culture.	Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) Rodney Needham (1923–2006)

Evolutionary Anthropology	Culture is the visible expression of an underlying evolved and adaptive genetic code.	E. O. Wilson (1929–2021) John Tooby (b. 1952)
Anthropology and Gender	The ways in which societies understand and categorize sexuality are central to understanding culture.	Michelle Rosaldo (1944–1981) Don Kullick (b. 1960)
Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology	Culture is how members of a society understand who they are and give meaning to life.	Mary Douglas (1921–2007) Clifford Geertz (1926–2006)
Practice Theory	Culture emerges from the dynamic relationship between social constraints and individual choices.	Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) Anthony Giddens (b.

		1938) Sherry Ortner (b. 1941)
Postmodernism	The constraints of observation and writing play a critical role in our attempts to analyze culture.	Renato Rosaldo (b. 1941) James Clifford (b. 1945)
Globalization	Culture is best analyzed as the global flow of identity, symbolism, money, and information, within a context of inequality.	Arjun Appadurai (b. 1949) David Harvey (b. 1935)
Please note that theories in anthropology are complex and cannot be summed accurately in a single line. There are many outstanding books about anthropological theory, including McGee and Warms, *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*.		

In this chapter, we explore some aspects of anthropological theory by examining each of the six points of our definition of culture. Each of these characteristics of culture tells us something about what it means to be human. However, each also raises questions, problems, and contradictions. This discussion is not meant to be an exhaustive description of the ways anthropologists see the world. Rather, it is intended to give some of the flavor of the lively debate among anthropologists about the nature of human society and allow you to reexamine some of the ideas and ways of behaving that we perhaps take for granted in our own and other societies.

CULTURE IS MADE UP OF LEARNED BEHAVIORS

Just about everything animate learns. Your dog, your cat, even your fish show some learned behavior. But, as far as we know, no other creature has as much learned behavior as human beings. We sometimes think of learning as an aspect of childhood, but in every society, human beings learn their culture continuously. We are socialized from the moment of our births to the time of our deaths (Figure 3.2).

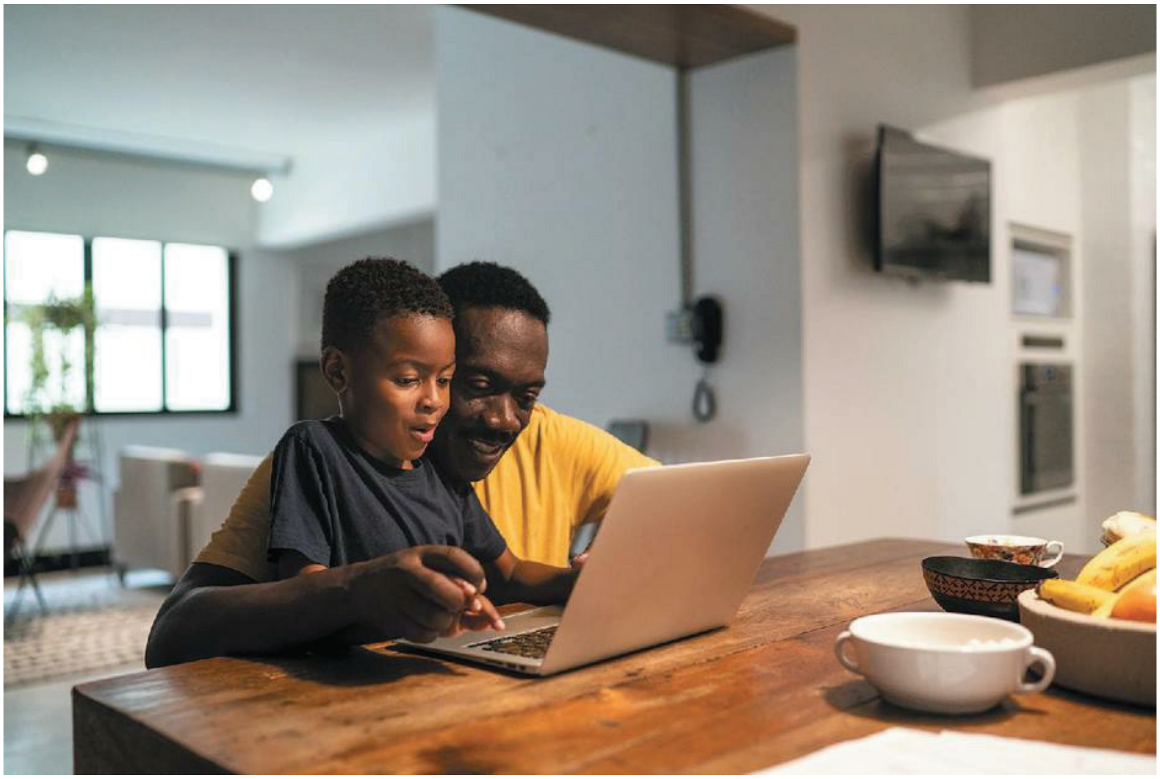


Figure 3.2 Culture is made of learned behaviors. We start learning culture the day we are born and continue all our lives. We learn from our parents, our peers, and our

community.

iStockphoto.com/FG Trade

Almost every aspect of our lives is layered with learning. Our heart beats, our eyes blink, and our knees respond reflexively to the doctor’s rubber mallet, but to get much beyond that, we need learning. Food is a good example. Humans must eat; that much is determined biologically. However, we don’t just eat; our culture teaches us what is edible and what is not. We decline many things that are nutritious because we don’t consider them to be food. Many insects, for example, are perfectly edible. The philosopher Aristotle was particularly fond of eating cicadas, and some species of beetles were eaten in northern Europe well into the 19th century. Yet most Americans have learned that insects are not food and will go hungry, to the point of starvation, before eating them. Further, we eat particular things at particular times, in particular places, and with particular people. For example, although it is perfectly acceptable to eat popcorn at the movies, you would be unlikely to have lamb chops and asparagus there.

Although large demands for labor and responsible behavior may be placed on children in many societies, all humans remain physically, emotionally, and intellectually immature well into their teen years and perhaps into their early twenties. This lengthy period of immaturity has profound implications. First, it allows time for an enormous amount of childhood learning; this means that very few specific behaviors need be under direct genetic or biological control. Second, it demands that human cultures be designed to provide relatively stable environments that allow time for this learning to take place.

Human infants grow into children and later into adults not simply as humans but as particular kinds of humans—Trobriand Islanders, Britons, Tlingit, Moroccans, or Tahitians, for example. Every society has both informal and formal means of transmitting its culture so that children grow up to be responsible and participating adults and so that the society is reproduced socially as well as biologically.

The biological processes of conception, birth, maturation, and death are the same for all human beings, although environmental factors such as nutrition and disease may affect them. However, in all societies, such biological processes are less important than the social understandings involved. Consider our society. When does a child become an adult? When they reach puberty? Get a driver's license? Graduate from high school or college? Get married? Has a child? Although some of these are clearly biological events, our discussion of the beginnings of adulthood will be primarily about culture, not biology.

The question of when a child becomes a human being is another good example of the cultural nature of growth. Birth is a biological event, but being born does not necessarily make an individual a human. Social birth refers to the point at which one is considered a human being and a member of human society (). There is much variability in when cultures recognize a fetus, an infant, or a child as a social person. The variability is linked to factors such as how the society produces its material needs, the relations between the sexes, the social stratification system, the culturally defined divisions of the life cycle, attitudes toward death, and, particularly, infant mortality rates.

For example, in Kassena Nankana province in northern Ghana studied by Pascale Allotey and Daniel Reidpath (2001), some newborns are believed to be *chichuru*, or "spirit children," not real children but spirits who come to the world to play and cause distress to their communities. A newborn may be a "spirit child" if it has physical abnormalities, if the child's birth is followed by tragic events, if the baby cries constantly, or if there were irregularities in the mother's sexual behavior or her pregnancy. A child identified as a "spirit child" is killed and buried without a funeral ceremony. Its family must perform a series of sacrifices to be cleansed. Allotey and Reidpath found that in this area, almost 15% of the deaths of children younger than 3 months were considered deaths of *chichuru*.

Often it is social birth rather than biological birth that is marked by ritual. Among the Toda of southern India, for example, newborns are not considered people until the age of 3 months, after which a "face opening” ceremony takes place. The infant is brought outdoors, her or his face is unveiled at dawn, and the child is introduced to the temple, to nature, to buffaloes, and their clan relatives ().

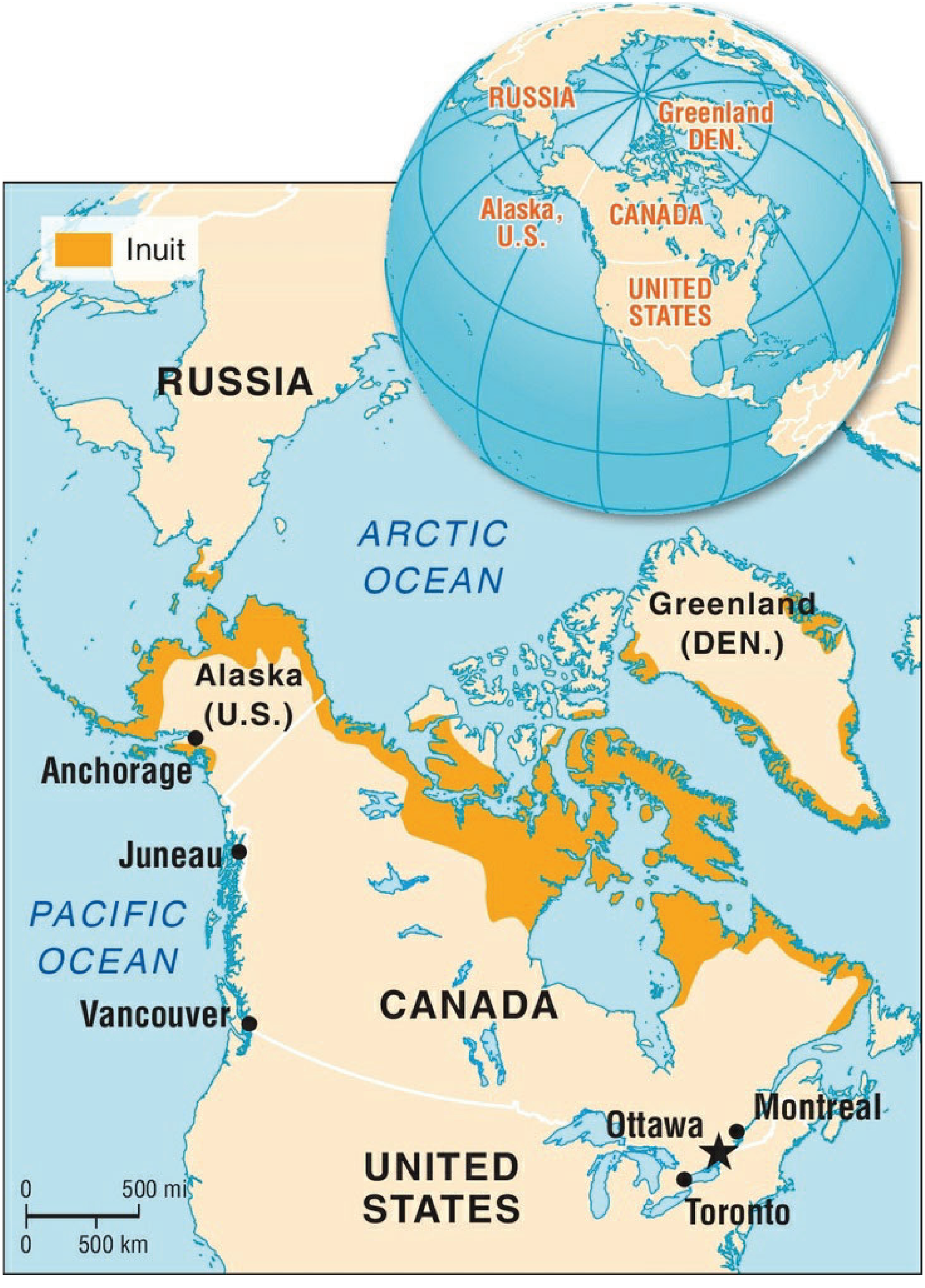
In the State of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil, among desperately poor shantytown residents, a child is not considered a social person until it shows physical and emotional signs of being able to survive. Wages are so low that shantytown adults and children need to work to avoid starvation. Infants are frequently left alone or with only very minimal care for long periods. Under these conditions, some children show wasting and are often passive and listless. Others have wild fits and convulsions. Such behaviors are understood by parents as indications that these children have an aversion to life. Babies suffering from chronic sickness are often seen as wanting to die. An elderly midwife explained to anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes that if a baby is born healthy, she instructs the mother to feed it. However, if it is born small or wasted, she tells the mother not to give it anything that will strengthen it. The midwife said, “We let Jesus decide … His plan, not ours” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, pp. 367–369). Scheper-Hughes reports that under these conditions, mothers distance themselves emotionally from such infants and believe that allowing their deaths is cooperating with God’s plan. Dead infants are buried in unmarked graves with little ceremony, and mothers are strongly discouraged from crying or grieving for them.

These examples from northeastern Ghana, southern India, and northeastern Brazil contrast sharply with American understandings. Almost all Americans agree that a newborn child is a member of society and has certain rights. Americans will almost always go to great lengths to make sure newborn children survive. However, Americans disagree about whether a blastula, embryo, or fetus has rights or is a member of society. Many abortion opponents argue that a social person with specific rights is created at the act of conception or shortly thereafter. Those who favor legal abortion argue that a social person is not created until the fetus can survive outside the womb. All sides in this debate cite deeply held beliefs. However, it is important to understand that although science can identify the moment of conception or the hour of birth, culture determines when a member of society comes into existence.

The recognition of human status is the beginning phase in human development. Beginning with birth, all humans pass through developmental phases. At each phase, the biologically based physical, mental, and psychological potentials of the individual unfold within a specific cultural context. As children grow into adults, their capacity to deal with the physical and social environment increases. These capacities diminish as adults age.

Child-rearing practices in all cultures are designed to produce adults who know the skills, norms, and behavior patterns—the cultural content—of their society. But the transmission of culture involves more than just knowing these things. It also involves patterning people’s attitudes, motivations, values, perceptions, and beliefs so that they can function in their society (which itself adapts to external requirements of the physical, social, and political environments). The process of learning to be a member of a particular cultural group is called **enculturation**.

As an example, we will take a closer look at child-rearing among the Inuit, a hunting people of the Arctic. The Inuit teach their children to deal with a world that is a dangerously problematic place, in which making wrong decisions might well mean death. Jean Briggs (1991, pp. 261–262) notes that to cope with the dangers of their environment, the Inuit maintained a “pervasively experimental way of living” that included a profound awareness of “the dangerous uncertainty in human relations.” Therefore, developing skills for solving problems quickly and spontaneously is central to Inuit child-rearing. Children are brought up to constantly test their physical and emotional skills, extend them, and learn their capacity for pain and endurance (Stern, 1999). Betsy Annahatak, an Inuk scholar from the Ungava Peninsula in Nunavik, writes that the goal of Inuit child-rearing is to create adults who have *silattutuq* —literally, who have a big world. People who have achieved *silattutuq* understand the interconnections of all beings and are respectful in their ways and interactions (Annahatak, 2014).


Inuit
RUSSIA
Greenland
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Alaska,
U.S.
CANADA
UNITED
STATES
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ARCTIC
OCEAN
Greenland
(DEN.)
Alaska
(U.S.)
Anchorage
Juneau
PACIFIC
OCEAN
Vancouver
CANADA
Ottawa
Montreal
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Toronto
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Description

Map 3.1 Location of Inuit communities.

Inuit children learn largely through observing their elders. Children are discouraged from asking questions. Rather, when confronted with a problem situation, they are expected to observe closely, reason, and find solutions independently. They watch, practice, and are then tested, frequently by adults asking them questions. For example, when traveling on the featureless, snow-covered tundra, an adult may ask a child, “Where are we? Have you ever been here before?” Others are existentially challenging. Adults may ask children, “Why don't you kill your baby brother?” or “Your mother's going to die—look, she's cut her finger—do you want to come live with me?” Such questions are not considered cruel. Rather, they force children to grapple with issues of grave consequence (Briggs, 2005, p. 161).

Play is a critical part of Inuit child-rearing. Inuit games prepare children for the rigors of the arctic environment by stressing hand–eye coordination, problem-solving, and physical strength and endurance. Some games involve learning by taking objects apart and trying to put them back together. This develops careful attention to details, relationships, patient trial and error, and a mental recording of results for future reference. Many games stress the body and test the limits of the individual’s psychological and physical endurance (see Nelson, 1983). In the ear pull game, for example, a thin loop of leather is positioned behind the ears of each of two competitors who then pull away from each other until one gives up in pain (Figure 3.3). Austin Sundum, a Tlingit who competes in the ear pull, notes that he needed seven stitches as the result of one competition (Schilling, 2021).

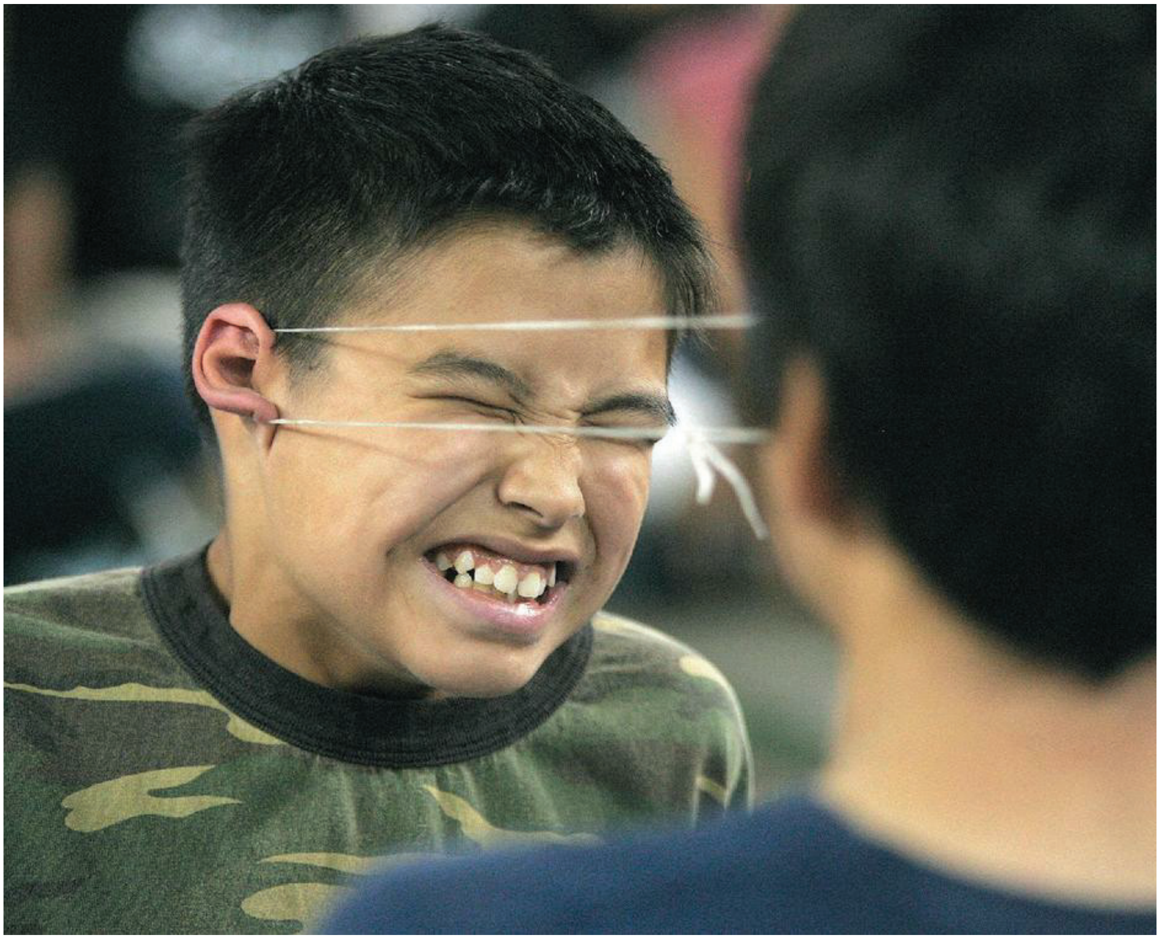

Figure 3.3 The Inuit ear pull game is a harsh test of physical endurance. Contestants pull against one another until one can no longer endure the pain. Here, Jacey Brave Heart, 12, pulls against Drew Dewberry at the 2007 World Eskimo Indian Olympics in Anchorage, Alaska.

In addition to being physically adept and independent, Inuit children must learn to be cooperative and emotionally restrained. Under the conditions of their closely knit and often isolated camp life, expressions of anger or aggression are avoided. The Inuit prize reason, judgment, and emotional control, and these are thought to grow naturally as children age.

The Inuit believe that children have both the ability and the wish to learn. Educating a child thus consists of providing the necessary information, which the child will sooner or later remember. Parents are willing to permit a child to experiment with potentially harmful behavior until the child learns not to repeat it. Scolding is seen as futile. Children will learn when they are ready; there is no point in forcing a child to learn something before they are ready to remember it. Inuit elders believe that frequent scolding makes children hostile, rebellious, and impervious to the opinions of others.

The study of enculturation has a central place in the history of anthropology and gave rise to some of its classic works. Margaret Mead's 1928 book *Coming of Age in Samoa* was a best seller and a landmark work that changed how Americans looked at childhood and culture. Mead and others who studied childhood learning are known as culture and personality theorists. Culture and personality theory was extremely influential from the 1920s until the 1950s. Culture and personality theorists believed that cultures could be thought of as having particular types of personalities. They held that cultures could best be understood by considering the relationship between patterns of child-rearing, adult lives, and social institutions. Today, the process of learning culture remains critical to many anthropologists, especially those who approach culture from a psychological perspective, those who study culture from the perspective of practice theory, and gender researchers. In *A World of Babies: Imagined Childcare Guides for Seven Societies* (2000), Judy DeLoache and Alma Gottlieb present a series of essays in which anthropologists describe the advice that might be given to new parents in different cultures. Other examples of works that focus on enculturation include *Play and the Human Condition* (2015), Thomas Henricks's examination of the social meanings behind play, and Kathleen Barlow and Bambi Chapin's (2010) collection of essays about mothering.

CULTURE IS THE WAY HUMANS USE SYMBOLS TO CLASSIFY THEIR WORLD AND GIVE IT MEANING

As human beings, we are unable to see everything in our environment. Instead, we pay attention to some elements of our surroundings and disregard others. For example, when you walk into a classroom, you notice friends and other students, the professor, video equipment, and so on. You might spend an entire semester without ever seeing the cracks in the ceiling, the pattern of the carpeting, or the color of the walls. Yet these things are as physically present as the chairs and your friends.

You see certain things in the classroom and overlook others because you mentally organize the contents of the classroom with respect to your role as a student. In that context, some of the things in the room, such as professors and friends, are relevant; other things, such as the color of the walls, you discount and may not notice at all. It is virtually impossible to see things without organizing and evaluating them in some manner.

If you paid as much attention to the cracks in the wall, the patterns on the floor, and the humming of the ventilation system as you did to the professor’s lecture, you would not only be likely to fail the class but also live in a world that was overwhelming and impossibly confusing. Only through fitting our perceptions and experiences into systems of organization and classification can we comprehend our lives and act in the world. A human without this ability would be paralyzed, frozen by an overwhelming bombardment of sensations. Indeed, this is one of the problems that some people with autism, such as Temple Grandin, often experience.

One way of thinking about culture is as a shared mental model; a codification of reality—a system of meaning that transforms physical reality, what is there, into experienced reality. Such methods of organizing and classifying are characteristics of groups. You are not the only one who thinks that the students and professors in a classroom are more important than the ceiling tiles; all students and professors probably share that perception.

Systems of Classification

Different cultures have different models for understanding and speaking about the world, and the ways people classify elements of their environment provide many examples. For instance, Bamana children in Mali classify some kinds of termites as food. Americans think of all termites as pests. Americans classify rainbows as objects of beauty and take pleasure in pointing them out to one another. Lacandon Maya in southern Mexico classify rainbows as dangerous and frightening, and it is highly inappropriate to point one out to another person. Dorothy Lee, an anthropologist who was interested in the different ways people see themselves and their environments, described her perception of reality as she looked out the window of her house: “I see trees, some of which I like to be there, and some of which I intend to cut down to keep them from encroaching further upon the small clearing I made for my house.” However, she noted that Black Elk, an Oglala Lakota holy man, “saw trees as having rights to the land, equal to his own. He saw them as the standing peoples, in whom the winged ones built their lodges and reared their families” (1987, p. 1).

Much of the early work in classification systems focused on how communities use language to organize their worlds. For example, in his classic work, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads* (1970), James Spradley interviewed homeless men who referred to themselves as tramps in Seattle detention centers. He found that they had numerous terms to describe different types of tramps. These included working stiffs, bindle stiffs, nose divers, Airedales, and Dings. Spradley then enumerated the characteristics of each of these and showed how men could be assigned to each classification. This way of doing research is sometimes referred to as ethnoscience. Understanding classification systems is extremely important for scholars interested in ethnobotany and ethnomedicine. Ethnobotany focuses on the relationship between humans and plants in different cultures. Ethnomedicine examines how people in different cultures understand health and sicknesses, as well as the ways they attempt to cure disease (Figure 3.4). In each case, discovering how people classify and organize their world is a key focus of research and can play an important role in preserving the rights of indigenous and minority groups (e.g., see Turner, 2020).

Figure 3.4 Cultures have different models for classifying diseases and medicines. Here, a pharmacist prepares an herbal medicine at a traditional Chinese pharmacy.

iStockphoto.com/Edwin Tan

Much of the anthropology of classification and organization focuses on how people understand the institutions and critical concepts around them. It explores how these understandings affect their behavior. For example, Naomi Quinn considered marriage in the United States. She focused on how people understood marriage and what they hoped to get out of it rather than the specific terms they used to describe it. She described a general American cultural schema or conceptual template for marriage that includes commitment, expectations for sharing, and that it be mutually beneficial and lasting (Quinn, 2019, p. 277). Perspectives like Quinn’s are sometimes called cognitive or psychological anthropology.

Some anthropologists believe that although the details of a system of classification may be unique to an individual culture, grand overall patterns to these systems are common to all humanity. The study of this aspect of culture is generally called structural anthropology. Perhaps the most important scholar in this school is the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (seen in Chapter 2, Figure 2.9). Lévi-Strauss and his followers compared the myths and beliefs of different cultures to isolate common patterns. They believed that these patterns reflect a universal underlying patterning of human thought: the tendency to divide everything into two opposing classes (male/female, good/bad, right/left) as well as a third class that crosses the boundary between the two.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Culturally Specific Diseases: The Case of Lia Lee

Because all human beings are biologically extremely similar, all are subject to the same biologically based diseases. However, how people classify, experience, and understand health and illness differs dramatically among cultures. Anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (1988) differentiates between disease, a patient’s biological problem, and illness; the social and cultural context in which the disease is experienced; and how the disease is classified.

Anthropologists have identified many culturally bound syndromes, illnesses that are identified in only one or a small number of cultures. Fan death, the commonly held Korean belief that running a fan overnight in a room with the windows and doors closed can lead to the death of those sleeping in the room, is one example (Jennings, 2013). *Bangungot*, the name for another culturally specific syndrome, is a term originating from the Tagalog word for “bad dream” and is found in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Bangungot is diagnosed when young people, particularly adolescent and young adult men, die suddenly in their sleep. Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa are culturally bound syndromes often found in rapidly industrializing societies, particularly in Western Europe, the United States, and Asia.

Different ways of classifying and understanding illness and treating disease present enormous challenges to health care around the world and particularly in multicultural societies such as the United States. The case of Lia Lee, described in Anne Fadiman’s now-classic 1997 *The Sprit Catches You and You Fall Down*, presents a powerful example and a cautionary tale. Lia Lee was the 14th child born to Foua Yang and Nao Kao Lee, Hmong refugees from Laos living in California (Figure 3.5). When Lia was 3 months old, she began to experience seizures. However, the Lees were unable to explain Lia’s condition to health care workers who spoke no Hmong and had no experience of Hmong culture. For the Lees, the seizures were evidence that Lia’s soul was being touched or taken by something from a different realm. Health care workers could not understand this, and it took a long time to diagnose Lia with epilepsy. However, this was the beginning of the problem, not the end. For the doctors, epilepsy was a disease to be treated with medicines, and they demanded that the Lees comply with their prescriptions, some of which were quite difficult and unpleasant to administer to a toddler. For the Lees, Lia’s symptoms showed that she had *qaug dab peg*, an illness caused when a person’s soul becomes separated from her body. Though Lia’s condition needed a cure, it also meant that she could have spiritual powers and might become a shaman.

Figure 3.5 Foua Yang, Lia Lee’s mother, holds Lia

Lee's picture in 2012.

Manny Crisostomo/Sacramento Bee/Tribune News Service via Getty Images

Doctors, social workers, and the Lee family fought bitterly over Lia's treatment. At one point, Lia was placed in foster care for a year because her parents refused to administer her medications, treating her instead with herbs and shamanic rituals. In 1986, when she was 4 years old, Lia suffered a profound seizure, followed by an infection. She lost most brain function and was expected to die, but she didn't. Although doctors and medical personnel at hospitals that treated her often spoke of her as if she were dead, she lived for another 26 years, never regaining consciousness but both cared for by her family and central to their lives. Though Fadiman (2012) acknowledges that it's not a medical explanation, she feels that Lia was kept alive by the constant love of her family.

Fadiman's account of Lia's story and the role of different cultural understandings in health care is required reading in many medical and social work programs. It was one of many cases that led to greater sensitivity regarding issues of language and culture in health care delivery in the United States. In an interview after Lia's death in the summer of 2012, Fadiman said that one of the key lessons of Lia's case was that Western medical personnel must try to understand illness from the point of view of their patients, particularly when they have patients from cultures that have different conceptions of health and illness. Doctors must understand that treatment is not something they can dictate but something that must be created through collaboration between patients and health care providers (Fadiman, 2012; Fox, 2012).

Cultures, Symbols, and Meaning

Human beings not only classify the world but also fill it with meaning. Members of every culture imbue their world with stories and symbols. Ideas, words, and actions have not only practical value but also symbolic meaning and emotional force. Human behavior signifies something. The central histories, legends, and lore of religions and cultures are not simply stories; they have powerful emotional resonance for us. People are literally willing to fight and die for their religious, moral, and political beliefs and, sometimes, the symbols that express these (Figure 3.6). Actions that challenge the central meanings of our culture, such as flag burning or the desecration of religious symbols, often bring an immediate and passionate response. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz put it, a human being is “an animal suspended in webs of significance which he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1973, p. 30). To say this another way, a culture is a story people tell themselves about themselves. Culture is the way people understand who they are and how they should act in the world. It is the context within which human actions can be understood.

Figure 3.6 Symbols do not have a single meaning but

stand for large numbers of ideas and feelings. For many people in the United States, patriotic symbols such as the flag have deep intellectual and emotional content.

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Symbols are the key mechanism people use to fill their world with meaning. The simplest definition of a symbol is something that stands for something else. Words (both spoken and written), objects, and ideas can all be symbols. Symbols enable us to store information. The book you are currently holding, for example, contains a huge amount of information all stored symbolically. Nonhuman animals must learn through experience or imitation. Because humans can store information symbolically, as stories and teachings passed from generation to generation, or as written words, their learning is not so limited. Human cultures can be endlessly large.

Symbols can also condense meaning. People may take a single symbol and make it stand for an entire constellation of ideas and emotions. Religious symbols and national symbols often have this characteristic. The meaning of a national flag or a religious symbol cannot be summed up in a word or two. These stand for vast complexes of history, ideas, and emotions.

Symbolic anthropologists try to understand a culture by discovering and analyzing the symbols that are most important to its members. These symbols often reflect the deep concerns of the culture’s members in ways that may be difficult for them to articulate. For example, among the Ndembu of East Africa, the *mudyi* tree is a central symbol that plays an important role in girls’ puberty rites. The tree has a white, milky sap, which symbolizes breastfeeding, the relationship between mother and child, inheritance through the mother’s family line, and, at the most abstract level, the unity and continuity of Ndembu society itself. It is unlikely that all Ndembu think deeply about all of these meanings during girls’ puberty rites. However, this complex symbolism helps hold Ndembu society together by reaffirming its central tenets (Turner, 1967). For anthropologists, understanding the meaning of the *mudyi* tree and the role it plays in Ndembu society is to have penetrated deeply into the Ndembu view of the world.

Culture can also be analyzed using the tools of literature; this is the job of interpretive anthropology. Clifford Geertz, one of the best-known interpretive anthropologists, said that in a sense, culture is like a novel. It is an "ensemble of texts … which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (2008, p. 574). Like all good stories, culture engrosses us and helps us understand the nature and meaning of life. It comments on who we are and how we should act in the world. Interpretive anthropologists often find these cultural texts in public events, celebrations, and rituals. Analyzing them gives us clues and insights into the meaning of culture for its participants.

Consider the American fascination with football (Figure 3.7). American football has little appeal outside the United States, but in the United States, it draws more fans than any other sport. To explain its popularity, analysts have studied the key themes of the game. They point out that the game is heavily laden with sexuality. In a famous essay called "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown," Alan Dundes (1980) noted that the vocabulary of football has many sexual overtones. Terms and expressions such as penetration, hitting the hole, making a touchdown in the end zone, scoring, going all the way, and so on are common. Football uniforms accentuate the male physique, resulting in an enlarged head and shoulders, a narrow waist, and a lower torso "poured into skintight pants accentuated only by a metal codpiece" (Arens, quoted by , p. 77). Dressed this way, men tackle each other, hold hands, hug each other, and pat each other's bottoms (Figure 3.7). Dundes's essay ignited outrage, but as Besnier, Brownell, and Carter note, "the boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality in human life is opaque, and that few contexts showcase the entanglement of the two more dramatically than sport" (2018, p. 155).

Figure 3.7 Studying the symbolism of football is useful for anthropologists who wish to understand critical themes in American culture.

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But sexuality is not the only important aspect of the sport. Football is, in Geertz’s terms, “playing with fire” (1973b). It attracts us because, more than other sports, it displays and manipulates topics such as the violence and sexuality underlying competition between men, the social role of women, the relationship of the individual to the group, rules and their infringement, gaining and surrendering territory, and racial character (Oriard, 1993, p. 18). As we watch football, we see these topics displayed and manipulated or implied.

Football is just a game, but so is checkers. Millions watch football because it is meaningful to them in ways that checkers is not. For interpretive anthropologists, football’s meaning derives from the ways in which it explores and comments on critical themes in American culture. It is a text that we read, and those who would understand Americans must learn to read it as well (see also our discussion of bullfighting in Chapter 12 and the Balinese cockfight in Chapter 14. Both of these present examples of the critical symbolic importance of cultural performances).

Interpretive and symbolic anthropologists use methods drawn from the humanities rather than the sciences to uncover and interpret the deep emotional and psychological structure of societies. Their goal is to understand the experience of being a member of a culture and to make that experience available to their readers (Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

CULTURE IS AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM – OR IS IT?

Consider mammals and many other animals. Their hearts pump blood, their lungs supply oxygen to the blood, their liver purifies blood, and so on. The various organs work together to create a properly functioning whole. An early insight in anthropology was that it can be useful to compare societies to organisms. The subsistence system provides food, the economic and political systems determine how the food is distributed, religion provides the justification for the distribution system, and so on. Societies, like bodies, are integrated systems.

This organic analogy has strengths and weaknesses. It allows us to think about society as composed of different elements (such as kinship, religion, and subsistence), and it implies that anthropologists should describe each element and the role it plays in society. They should be able to categorize how change in one element affects the other. For example, subsistence and social structure are two identifiable social elements and are related to each other. Many small-scale societies provision themselves through foraging—the collection and hunting of wild plants and animals. Foraging groups must be quite small, and foraging is an activity that requires little direction or coordination. Thus, people who forage for their food will probably have relatively loosely defined social groups with changing membership. On the other hand, farming requires more coordination than foraging, and therefore people who farm will likely have a society with a more rigid structure and a more stable membership. If a group were to move from foraging to farming, we would expect it to develop an increasingly well-defined social structure.

Anthropologists drawn to the study of the relationships among different elements of culture and how these elements support one another are called functionalists. These anthropologists often sought to find laws of cultural behavior. In the first half of the 20th century, functionalists such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski searched for such laws in the mutually supportive relationships among kinship, religion, and politics. For example, Radcliffe-Brown argued that religion supports social structure by giving individuals a sense of dependence on their society (1965, p. 176).

More recently, ecological functionalists have focused on the relationship between the environment and society. Rather than seeing cultures as being like organisms, these anthropologists view social institutions and practices as elements in broader ecological systems. They are particularly concerned with ways cultural practices both alter and are altered by the ecosystem in which they occur. For example, Marvin Harris’s (1966) classic explanation of the Hindu taboo on eating beef focused on the effect of cattle in the Indian environment rather than on the Hindu belief system. Harris noted that historically, despite widespread poverty and periodic famine in India, Hindus refuse to eat their cattle. Although this seems unreasonable superficially, it makes good ecological sense. Cows are important in India because they provide dung for fertilizer and cooking fuel, and they give birth to bullocks, the draft animals that pull plows and carts essential to agriculture. If a family ate its cows during a famine, it would deprive itself of the source of bullocks and could not continue farming. In the short run, the family would be fed, but it would be far more likely to starve or fall into poverty in the long run. Thus, the Hindu religious taboo on eating beef is part of a larger ecological pattern that includes the subsistence system. It functions to keep that system stable (Figure 3.8).

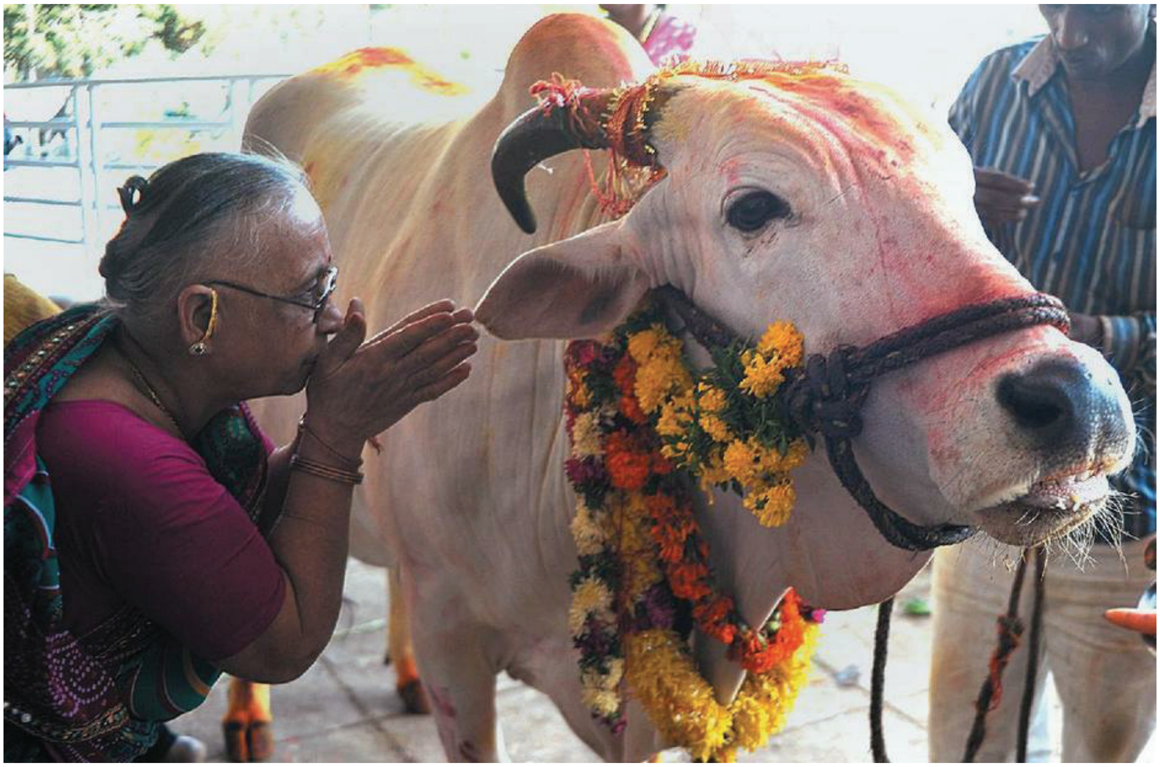

Figure 3.8 Many Hindus explain their reverence for cows in religious terms, but ecological functionalists such as Marvin Harris explain it in terms of the roles that cattle play in the Indian environment. Here, a woman offers prayers to an elaborately decorated cow before Gopastami, a holiday that celebrates Lord Krishna's father giving him the responsibility of taking care of cows, a sign of his coming of age.

NOAH SEELAM/AFP via Getty Images

Functionalism is a powerful way of thinking about society and provides important insights. However, the comparison of societies to organisms has some critical problems. The organic analogy implies that properly functioning societies should be stable and free of conflict. The parts of a biological organism work together to keep the entire being alive and well. The lungs do not declare war on the liver. If such conflict occurs (an autoimmune disease, for example), we understand that the organism is not functioning properly and that failure to restore the system will result in sickness or death. Thinking of cultures as systems may similarly suggest that their parts should work in harmony and that conflict and struggle are deviations from normality that need correction. But are cultures really like that? Do their elements fit well together?

Although they accept that cultures are patterned systems, anthropologists today argue that the elements of these systems never fit together perfectly. Because of this, conflict and struggle are fundamental parts of all cultures rather than problems needing remedies. This position often reflects the deep influence of the work of Karl Marx and of Max Weber, who was a sociologist in the early 20th century. Both Marx and Weber saw conflict in society as a key factor driving social change. Anthropologists who rely on their insights are often referred to as neo-Marxists.

Consider the relationship between the American family and the workplace as an example of conflict in society. Does the family system fit well with the demands made by jobs? Most Americans probably want to maintain long-term marriage commitments, raise families, and live middle-class lifestyles. Most jobs in the United States provide inadequate income for this purpose. Furthermore, jobs often require mobility, long hours, and flexibility, all of which conflict with the stability and dependability families need. Americans must negotiate the conflicts among the lifestyle they desire, the demands of their families, and the requirements of their jobs. For most people, there is no way to satisfy all of these demands simultaneously. Some interests are always sacrificed to others.

Consider that in socially stratified societies, different groups have different and often opposing interests, and this creates conflict. Institutional arrangements within and between societies may favor one group over another. Societies may be divided into castes, or individuals of a particular ethnic origin may be relegated to undesirable positions. For example, consider any large corporation. Both the workers and the owners want the company to do well, but within this context, the owners hope to maximize their profit and the workers want to maximize their pay. Because increases in the cost of labor come at some expense to profits, there is a structural conflict between the owners and the workers. This conflict does not occur because society is not working properly. Rather, it is a fundamental condition of capitalist society. The conflict between workers and owners has the potential to erupt in violence. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, labor strikes in the United States repeatedly resulted in death and injury as security forces, police, the National Guard, and the army battled strikers. Even during World War II, a time we usually think of as characterized by great internal solidarity, the United States experienced 14,471 strikes involving 6,774,000 workers (Brecher, 1972).

There is nothing uniquely American or capitalist about contradiction and conflict within culture. Although conflicts are exacerbated in socially stratified societies, social life in all societies is characterized by conflict as well as concord. People in nonindustrialized societies must also handle conflicting commitments to their families and other social groups, such as secret societies or religious associations. Even in societies that lack social groups beyond the family, the interests of men and women may differ, as may those of the old and young. Culture is certainly patterned and surely a system, but its parts rub, chafe, and grind against one another.

CULTURE IS A SHARED SYSTEM OF NORMS AND VALUES – OR IS IT?

What would a person with their own private culture be like? Perhaps they would be like Temple Grandin, Tim Page, or other high-functioning people with autism—able to exist in the social world but unable to “get it.” Alternatively, such a person might live in a world in which everything would have one set of meanings to them but different meanings to everyone else. People with certain forms of schizophrenia seem to have just this problem; they live in worlds filled with symbols that are of meaning only to themselves (Elvevåg et al., 2011). It would be very difficult for such people to interact with others; they would probably be isolated and, in some cases, obviously insane. It is clear, then, that at some level, members of a culture must share ways of thinking and behaving. Often, we refer to these as norms and values.

Norms and values are two sorts of ideas that members of a culture might share. **Norms** are shared understandings about the way things ought to be done. For example, shaking hands rather than bowing when introduced to a stranger is an American norm. **Values** are shared ideas about what is true, right, and beautiful. For example, the notion that advances in technology are good is an American value; most Americans agree that humans can and should transform nature to meet human ends. Norms and values are often embedded in rules of behavior that reflect and reinforce culture. In many cases, they seem to cluster around certain identities, roles, or positions in society. Members of all cultures have ideas about how people such as parents, politicians, or priests ought to think and behave.

Human behavior is not always consistent with cultural norms or values (Figure 3.9). What people do and what they say they do are rarely the same. For example, among upper-middle-class Hindus living in large cities in India, the norm of social equality among all classes of society is widely accepted. However, this norm is considerably different from actual behavior, which rarely involves social interaction between people of the highest and lowest castes on a basis of equality (Economist, 2020).

Norms may also be contradictory and can be manipulated for personal and group ends. For example, people in India believe that women should be in their homes and not out socializing with their friends. They also believe that women should spend a lot of time in religious activities. Modern Indian women use the second of these norms to get around the first. By forming clubs whose activities are religious, they have an excuse to get out of the house to which their elders cannot object too strongly.

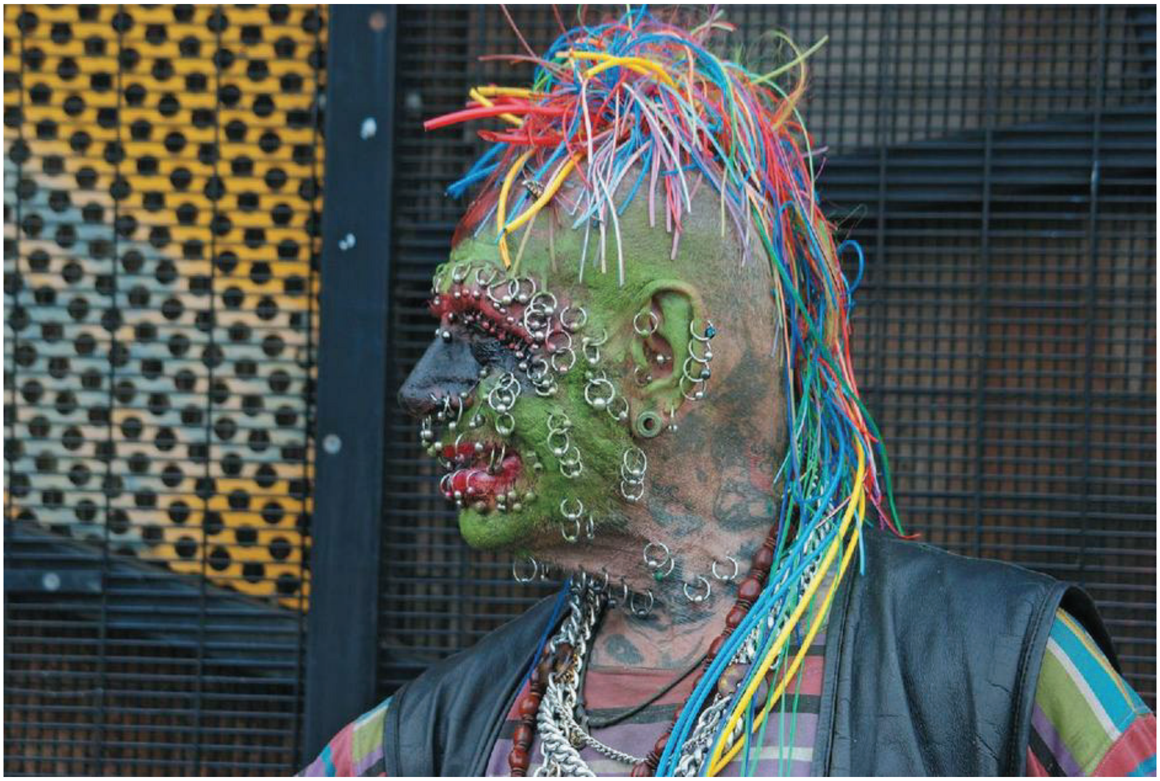

Figure 3.9 Although cultures demand a certain amount of consensus, members often show great variability in knowledge, style, and beliefs. In this picture we see John Lynch (b. 1930), a retired bank manager in England, who was, in the late 2000s, the most pierced man in England. Lynch said, “I knew I wanted to stand out a bit from the crowd, and I could not do that at the bank” (Nissim, 2009).[1]

These examples raise important questions about norms and values. How do we determine the norms and values of any society? Do all people in society agree on these things? How many people must agree on something before it is considered a norm or a value? Who gets to decide these sorts of things?

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Historically, anthropologists tended not to worry much about these issues. They assumed that the small non-Western societies they studied were homogeneous. It followed that people in such societies always acted in the same way in the same situation and attached the same meanings and values to cultural patterns. As early as 1936, however, Ralph Linton, an important American anthropologist, noted that not everyone participates equally in a culture.

Research shows that even in small societies, norms are not always followed and values are not universal. Individuals differ in their knowledge, understanding, and beliefs. For example, one might expect that all members in a small fishing society would be able to agree on the proper names for different kinds of fish, but on Pukapuka, the small Pacific atoll that Robert Borofsky (1994) studied, this is not the case. Even experienced fishermen disagree about fish names much of the time.

Differences among individuals or groups within a society may be significant when values and beliefs are at issue. A close look at societies with significant sex segregation, such as those in Papua New Guinea (Hammar, 1989) and the Amazon (Murphy & Murphy, 1974), makes it clear that men and women do not attach the same meanings to many of the myths and rituals that maintain the system of male dominance.

The degree to which people do not share a single culture is even more obvious in larger societies. Sometimes the term **subculture** is used to designate groups within a single society that share norms and values significantly different from those of the dominant culture (Figure 3.10). The terms *dominant culture* and *subculture* do not refer to better and worse, superior and inferior, but rather to the idea that the dominant culture is the more powerful.

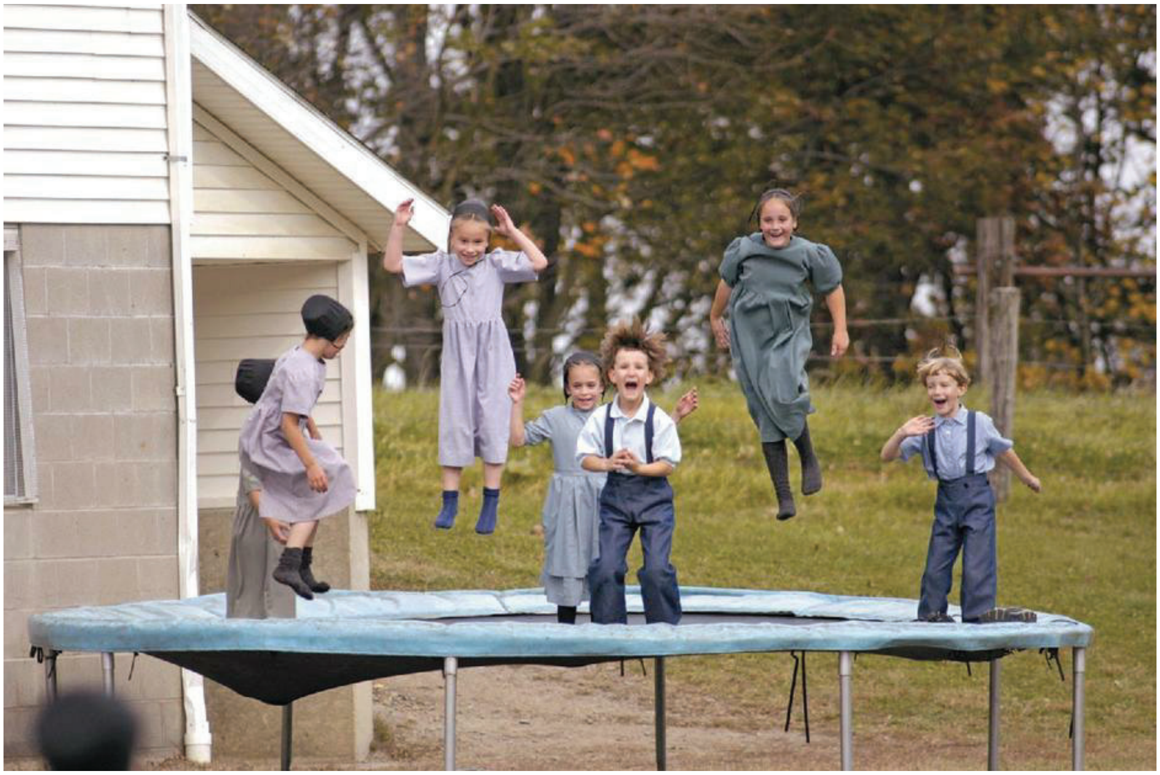


Figure 3.10 The Amish are members of an American subculture. Some of their customs, language, and values are different from those of most Americans. However, not all … in this picture, Amish kids play on a trampoline.

agefotostock/Alamy Stock Photo

Dominant cultures retain their power partly through control of institutions like the legal system, criminalizing practices that conflict with their own (Norgren & Nanda, 2006). In contemporary society, public schools help maintain the values of the dominant culture, and the media play an important role in encouraging people to perceive subcultures in stereotypical (and usually negative) ways. For example, in a study that focused on television news and reality shows, Mary Oliver (2003) found that images of race and crime systematically overrepresented African Americans as criminals. Further, such shows tended to portray Black men as particularly dangerous and present information about Black suspects that assumed their guilt. In a 2017 study, Travis L. Dixon found that news and opinion media in the

United States radically overrepresent Black poverty. Dixon showed that about 59% of the coverage of the poor in news and opinion is about Black families, but these families make up only 27% of the poor in the United States. White families, who make up 66% of the poor, get only 17% of the coverage (Dixon, 2017).

Although domination of one group by another may be extreme in some situations, it is rarely complete. People contest their subjugation through cultural, political, economic, and military means. Sometimes, when domination is intense, people can only contest it through religious faith and tales that cast themselves in positions of power and their oppressors in weak roles (J. Scott, 1992).

The result of struggles between groups in society is that norms and values, ideas we sometimes think of as timeless and consensual, are constantly changing and being renegotiated. This dynamic process involves conflict and subjugation as well as consensus. Understanding that norms and values are the results of such processes is critical because these cultural ideas influence and are influenced by real issues of wealth, power, and status.

In the United States, for example, do we see individuals as responsible for their own destinies or as the product of social circumstances? The question is extremely complicated and has very important political ramifications. In the standard version of the American Dream, people compete with one another, and the most talented and hardest-working individuals achieve material success. But is this really how the United States works? For people’s hard work and talent to be justly rewarded, everyone must start with a more-or-less equal chance for success. Some Americans insist that this is the case and people do start out with approximately equal chances. Thus, failure is the result of lack of talent, poor individual choices, and incorrect actions, and society bears little responsibility for helping people to succeed. Other Americans reject this notion, proposing instead that success or failure depends to a considerable extent on accidents of birth and the many forms of prejudice institutionalized in American society. If this is true, it follows that society has an obligation to provide services and programs that benefit historically oppressed groups. This point of view is common among the poor and among members of minority groups (Hochschild, 1995). For example, a Gallup poll conducted in 2016 found that only 28% of non-Hispanic whites thought the government should play a major role in trying to improve the social and economic position of Blacks and other minorities in the United States, but 64% of Blacks thought that it should (Gallup, 2021).

Believing either that blame for failure is individual or that family and ethnic background plays the most important role in social advancement does not make one individual more or less American than another. However, which of these notions those in power hold is critical. It determines public support for social welfare programs that, for good or ill, have a direct economic impact on the lives of many Americans.

For a culture to hold together, its members must have a great deal in common. However, determining exactly what they share is not easy. Anthropologists have generally assumed that people need to share information to form a society. It may well be, however, that people share certain information because they have learned how to interact with one another. In other words, shared ideas and the sense of community may be the result of human interaction rather than its cause.

Historically, the notion of culture as a shared set of norms and values was associated with American anthropology in the first half of the 20th century. Many students of the pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas, including A. L. Kroeber, Paul Radin, Robert Lowie, Ruth Benedict, and Cora DuBois, saw shared norms and values as central to culture and tried to identify and describe the beliefs, values, and psychological characteristics that were critical to individual specific cultures. In contrast, some contemporary neo-Marxist, postmodern, and feminist anthropologists hold that culture is a context in which norms and values are contested. Rather than assuming a core of commonalities shared by members of a culture, these anthropologists try to describe the processes through which norms and values are both subverted and maintained. They often focus on the role of governments and other institutions in that process. This issue is examined in more detail in Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

CULTURE IS THE WAY HUMAN BEINGS ADAPT TO THE WORLD

All animals, including human beings, have biologically based needs. All need food and a place to live, and each species must reproduce. All creatures are adapted to meet these needs. **Adaptation** is a change in the biological structure or lifeways of an individual or population by which it becomes better fitted to survive and reproduce in its environment. Nonhuman animals fill their needs primarily through biological adaptation. Lions, for example, have a series of biologically based adaptations that are superbly designed to enable them to feed themselves (and their mates). They have large muscles for speed as well as sharp teeth and claws to capture and eat their prey.

Humans are different. We are lacking in offensive biological weaponry, and if left to get our food like lions, we would surely starve. There is little evidence that we have an instinct to hunt or consume any particular kind of food, to build any particular sort of structure, or to have a single fixed social arrangement. Instead, human beings, in groups, develop forms of knowledge and technologies that enable us to feed ourselves and to survive in our environments. We pass this knowledge from generation to generation and group to group. In other words, human beings develop and use culture to adapt to the world (Figure 3.11).

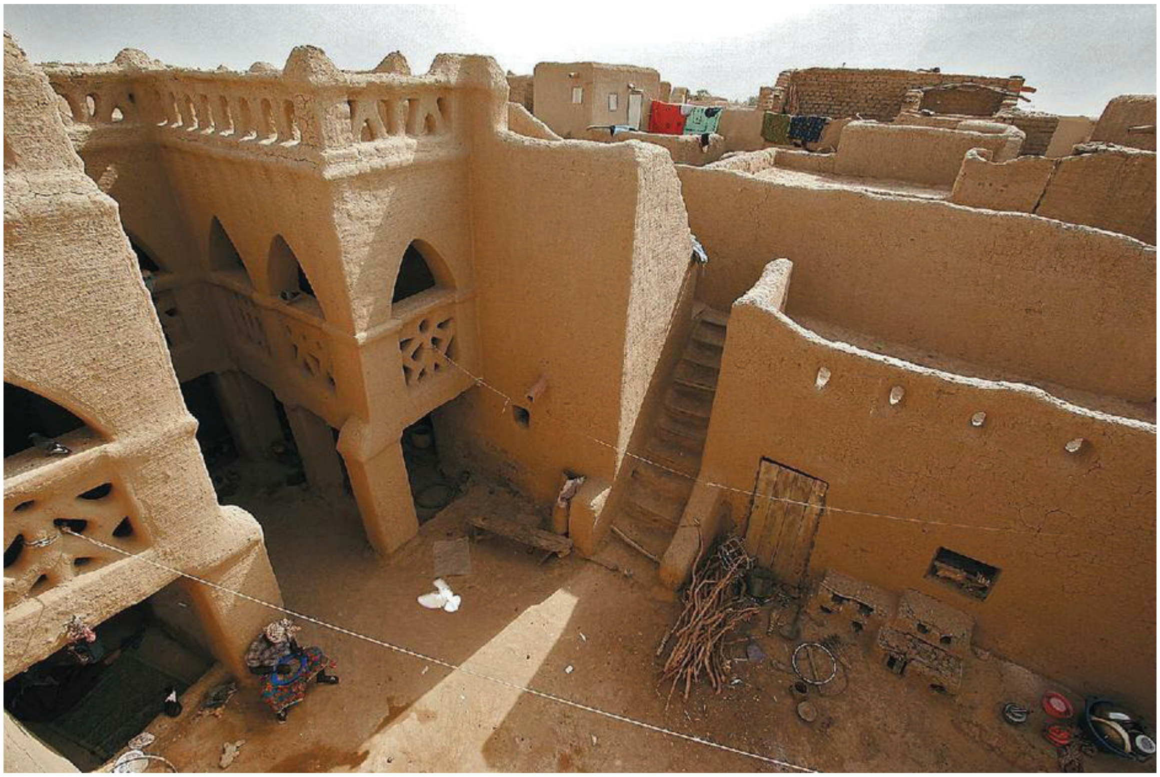


Figure 3.11 In Djenne, Mali, people adapt to the hot, mostly dry climate by building houses in adobe. The picture shows the inner courtyard of a Djenne house. Thick walls keep rooms relatively cool in the hot season and warm when it’s cold. Flat roofs create more living space and can be used for sleeping during hot weather.

FRANCOIS XAVIER MARIT/AFP/GettyImages

Most of a lion’s adaptation to the world is set biologically. The growth of its teeth and claws, its instinct to hunt, and the social arrangement of a pride are largely expressions of the lion’s genetic code. Humans also have a biological adaptation to the world: the ability to learn the specifics of a culture. All humans automatically learn the culture of their social group. The only exceptions are people with profound biologically based difficulties (such as autism) and, sometimes, victims of extreme abuse. The fact that humans universally learn and use culture strongly suggests that such learning is a manifestation of our genetic code.

Although our biology compels us to learn culture, it does not compel us to learn a particular culture. An infant from one cultural group adopted by parents of another will learn its adoptive parents’ culture. The range of human beliefs and practices is enormous. Despite this variation, culture must do certain things. People everywhere learn to fill their basic needs, such as food and shelter, through cultural practices. Therefore, culture everywhere must, to some extent, be adaptive.

Cultural adaptation has some distinct advantages over biological adaptation. Because humans adapt through learned behavior, they can change their approach to solving problems more quickly and easily than creatures whose adaptations are primarily biological. Furthermore, biological or evolutionary change is based on the presence of more highly adapted variations within the gene pool of a species. These variations occur as chance mutations. If the variations happen not to be present, no change is possible. For example, imagine a species of fish living in a freshwater pond. If the pond is polluted by industrial waste to which the fish are susceptible, all will die except those that, by chance, have a genetic makeup that allows them to survive in the polluted water. These will go on to give birth to the next generation of fish. If such a variation does not exist, none will survive and the fish will become extinct. There is no way a fish can learn how to live in the polluted water. Either the genetic variation that allows some of them to survive is present or it is not. Human beings, on the other hand, can learn to live in many polluted environments. They can develop ways to clean the environment or mechanisms to enable their survival within it. People can teach these things to others. No biological change is necessary.

Lions hunt and eat today in much the same way as they have for tens of thousands of years. The vast majority of human beings today do not live like humans of three or four generations ago, let alone our distant ancestors. Our means of feeding ourselves, our culture, have changed. **Plasticity**—the ability to change behavior in response to a range of environmental demands—has allowed human beings to thrive under a wide variety of ecological conditions.

Cultural adaptation has some disadvantages too. Misinformation may creep into human behavior, leading to cultural practices that hinder rather than aid survival. For example, before the Civil War era, very few Americans ate tomatoes and many considered them to be poisonous and therefore did not use this valuable food source (Smith, 2001). Cultural practices that encourage overpopulation or the destructive depletion or contamination of natural resources may lead to short-term success but long-term disaster. Further, it is clear that many human practices are not adaptive, even in the short run. Political movements such as policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide that urge people to murder their neighbors may benefit their leaders, but it is hard to see any meaningful way in which they are adaptive. A normal lion will always inherit the muscles, teeth, and claws that let it survive. Normal humans, on the other hand, may inherit a great deal of cultural misinformation that hinders their survival.

Anthropologists who view culture as an adaptation tend to be concerned with people’s behavior, particularly as it relates to their physical well-being. They ask questions about subsistence technology and its relationship to family structure, religion, and other elements of society. They investigate how cultures adapt to specific environments and how cultures have changed in response to new physical and social environments. Such anthropologists may identify themselves as belonging to theoretical schools such as cultural ecology, cultural materialism, neo-evolutionism, neo-Marxism, evolutionary psychology, and human behavioral ecology.

Ethnography

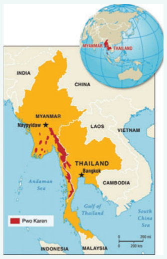
Building a House in Northwestern Thailand

One way of thinking about culture is to see it as an adaptation to the environment. All living things are biologically adapted to their environments, and all use these adaptations to survive and reproduce. For example, the giraffe’s long neck allows it to feed on leaves that other creatures cannot reach; the polar bear’s white fur protects it from the cold and allows it to blend into its environment and more easily catch its prey. Human beings are also adapted to the environment in many ways. Our bodies were shaped in the evolutionary process of adaptation.

The necessity for humans to learn a culture is a biologically based aspect of the human brain. All neurologically normal people learn the culture they grow up in, and this culture always functions as an adaptation to their economic, social, political, and physical environment. Just as long necks enable giraffes to get their food and white fur helps polar bears hunt, human culture allows us to survive in specific environments. The adaptive aspects of culture can often be seen in the different ways humans satisfy their basic needs for food, shelter, and safety. Anthropologist James Hamilton found out about the adaptive nature of traditional shelter the hard way when he tried to build a house for himself while doing fieldwork among the Pwo Karen of northwestern Thailand (J. Hamilton, 1987).

To learn about house construction, Hamilton carefully observed the details of building a house. A Karen house is a wooden post structure, raised about 6 feet off the ground, with bamboo walls, a peaked roof, and a veranda. There are no windows; the space between the thatch of the roof and the top of the walls serves for light and ventilation. The kitchen is in the house, with a water storage area on one side of the veranda. This is an important feature of a house because Karen customs of sociability require that visitors and guests be offered water.

Although Hamilton knew a great deal about Karen house construction, when he went to build his own home, he decided to incorporate his own ideas of what a proper house should be. Hamilton’s ideas were formed in suburban America of the mid-20th century. And he tried to replicate these in Thailand. First, because the climate was very hot, he insisted that his house be located in a shaded area under some tall trees. The Karen villagers suggested that this was a bad location but failed to dissuade him. Like many Americans, Hamilton also liked his lawn—a wide grassy area in front of his house—and protested when the villagers started pulling up the grass. He said he was not concerned about the snakes and scorpions that might be in the grass; besides, he had a flashlight and boots in case he had to go out at night. In a traditional Karen house, a person cannot stand up straight because the side walls are less than 5 feet high. To accommodate his belief that people ought to be able to stand up in their houses, Hamilton lowered the floor to about 2 feet off the ground. Furthermore, because the Karen house is dark and, to Americans, rather small, Hamilton decided to have his kitchen outside the house. Despite Karen grumbling that this was not the proper way to build a house, he built an extension on one side of the house with a lean-to roof covering made of leaves, and this became his kitchen. Finally, when the Karen started to cut off the long overhanging thatch from the roof, Hamilton asked that they let it remain because it gave him some privacy from eyes peering over the wall, which did not meet the top of the house.


MYANMAR
THAILAND
INDIA
CHINA
MYANMAR
Naypyidaw
LAOS
VIETNAM
THAILAND
Bangkok
CAMBODIA
Andaman Sea
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea
Pwo Karen
0 200 mi
0 200 km
INDONESIA
MALAYSIA

Areas of Thailand and Myanmar where the Pwo Karen live.

After the house was finished and Hamilton had lived in it for a while, he found out why the Karen did not like the alterations he had made to their traditional design. The part of Thailand where he lived has a heavy rainy season. Because the house was under the trees, the roof could not dry out properly and it rotted. In addition, so many twigs and branches fell through the roof that it became like a sieve, barely providing any protection from the rain at all. The slope of the lean-to over the kitchen was not steep enough; instead of running off, the water came through the roof. The roof on that whole side of the house had to be torn off and replaced with a steeper roof, made of sturdier and more expensive thatch.

The nice lawn combined with the reachable thatch of the roof offered too great a temptation for the local cows, who tried to eat it. One morning, Hamilton woke to find his lawn covered with piles of cow dung, with hundreds of dung beetles rolling little balls of dung all around the yard. He cut off the thatch overhang that was left under the trees and pulled up all the grass.

Because the house had been built low to the ground (by Karen standards) in a shady, cool, wet area, there was insufficient ventilation and drying in and around the house to prevent mildew. This meant that Hamilton had to sweep the walls and wipe all leather objects once a week and tightly seal all his belongings, especially his field notes. The typical Pwo Karen house was well adapted to the environment. Hamilton changed it in ways that seemed natural and logical to him but that worked very poorly in the Pwo Karen environment.

Hamilton’s ideas about what constituted a proper house reflected the ecology, political structure, and economy of his own culture. For example, Americans who grow up in suburbia may consider a lawn a normal part of housing while those who grow up in the city may sometimes long for somewhere that’s green. We may consider something like the desire for a green lawn a personal choice: Some people like to have a house with a lawn; others do not. However, the story is much more complex than that. For most people in the world, the choice of whether or not to have a lawn would never arise. Lawns have an ecological, social, symbolic, and economic context. They are specific to certain social, economic, and geographical groups in the United States and are found only rarely in other cultures.

Lawns probably originated with the aristocratic English notions of landscape in the 18th century. The idea that average middle-class citizens should have lawns was promoted in the United States after the Civil War, particularly by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead. Lawns were first popularized in the Chicago area and on the East Coast, environments where grass grew easily, and venomous pests were rare. However, lawns didn't take off in America until after World War II. At that time, aided by government-financed loan programs, many white Americans began moving out of cities and into newly built suburban areas. Single-family housing with lawns was promoted as healthful. For example, a pamphlet given to new homeowners in Levittown, a large new suburb outside New York City, stated, “No single feature of a suburban residential community contributes so much to the charm and beauty of the individual home and locality as well-kept lawns” (Levitt & Sons, 1953; Figure 3.12). In this era, lawns became so closely tied to the idea of the proper American middle-class lifestyle that they were frequently installed in Southwestern desert suburbs around cities such as Phoenix and Tucson where environmental conditions were extremely unfavorable to them.

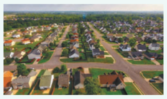


Figure 3.12 Beginning in the 1950s, builders, planners, and industries promoted a vision of a mass middle-class American lifestyle that included single-family suburban houses with grass lawns.

iStockphoto.com/Barry Richards

Lawns also depended directly on technology. First, the suburbs themselves, where most lawns were found, depended on each family having a car. Second, lawns had to be mowed. Before the invention of the lawnmower in 1830, lawns had to be cut by hand, a laborious and expensive process. Larger lawns could not become widely popular until the mass production of power lawnmowers, and that did not happen until the 1950s. They also depended on fertilizers and pesticides (Jenkins, 1994) and were heavily promoted by the industries that manufactured these products. In 2019, the lawn care industry in the United States had total revenues of almost 100 billion dollars and the average U.S. family spent about $500 on lawn care and gardening (Statistica, 2021).

The Pwo Karen, of course, lacked a history that linked lawns with wealth and power, suburban housing, automobiles, and lawnmowers. Having a lawn was not a choice that would occur to them. Like Hamilton's idea of proper housing, the Pwo Karen's idea was matched to the history and the physical and social environment of their culture. Hamilton and the Pwo Karen each found the other's ideas of what constitutes a proper house strange. However, in this case, the Pwo Karen's ideas about housing worked. Hamilton's ideas may have worked well at his home in the United States, but they failed when he tried them among the Pwo Karen.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. James Hamilton's experience shows that even though traditional Karen housing ideals did not match U.S. notions of housing, they were well adapted to the Pwo Karen environment. What particular design features of housing are adaptations to the environment where you live?
2. Is housing in the United States generally well adapted to the environment? Consider both modern and older construction. Is modern construction better adapted to the environment than older construction?
3. Because it is a physical object, it is easy to see a house as

an adaptation. But intangible things such as social structure and family type can also be adaptations. For example, the Shoshone Indians lived in the deserts of the American West and supported themselves by hunting animals and gathering plants. They lived in family groups of fewer than 20 people. In what way was living in such small groups an adaptation to their environment?

CULTURE IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING

In the popular press or movies, one often hears of “Stone Age peoples.” The implication is that a group of people has been living in precisely the same way for thousands of years. This romantic notion is incorrect. Even people who seem to have no contact with the outside world are usually those who fled from past contact. Cultures are constantly changing, and change often involves issues of conflict and oppression as well as consensus and solidarity.

Cultures change because of conflict among different elements within them. They change because of contact with outsiders. Innovation, population growth, disease, climate change, and natural disaster all drive culture change. However, cultures do not always change at the same speed. Cultural change may happen in small increments, or it may happen in revolutionary bursts. Historically, in most places and at most times, culture change has been a relatively slow process. However, the pace of change has been increasing for the past several hundred years and has become extremely rapid in the past century.

The most important source of culture change since the 16th century has been the development of a world economic system based primarily in the wealthy nations of Europe and Asia. This has involved invasions, revolutions, and epidemic diseases. These historic processes and the resultant global economic system are the primary topics of Chapters 15 and 16. In this chapter, we focus on some of the more traditional ways anthropologists have examined culture change.

Anthropologists usually discuss cultural change in terms of innovation and diffusion. An **innovation** is a new object, way of thinking, or way of behaving that is qualitatively different from existing forms (Barnett, 1953, p. 7; Figure 3.13). Although we are likely to think of innovations as technological, they are not limited to the material aspects of culture. New art forms and new ideas can also be considered innovations.

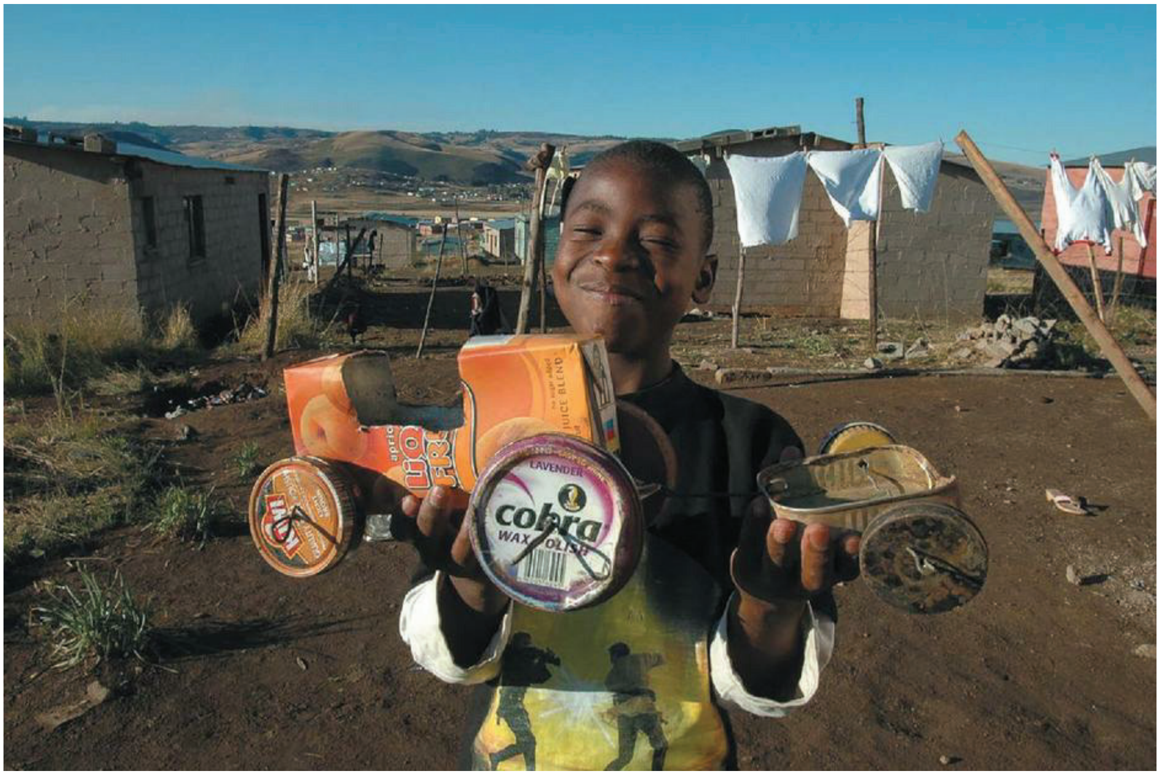


Figure 3.13 Innovation involves repurposing old materials to create something new. Here, a child in Transkei, South Africa, shows off toy cars he has made from discarded tins and cartons.

Susan Winters Cook/Getty Images

Some innovations seem to be genuinely new and different. Anthropologists sometimes call these primary innovations. Primary innovations are often chance discoveries and accidents. In our society, some examples of primary innovations include penicillin, discovered when British researcher Alexander Fleming noticed that bacteria samples he had left by a window were contaminated by mold spores, and Teflon, discovered by Roy Plunkett, who was trying to find new substances to use in refrigeration. Microwave ranges were invented by Percy LeBaron Spencer while he was working on radar. And the artificial sweetener aspartame was discovered by James Schlatter, who was trying to develop a drug to treat ulcers. Of course, such accidental discovery is not limited to our society or time. For example, the fact that clay hardens and becomes durable when it is fired was probably accidentally discovered in many different cultures.

Primary innovations are sometimes called inventions. We resist this term, however. The idea of invention seems to imply something wholly new and completely different, but no innovation is completely new. Even the examples listed previously happened within a cultural context that provided the background, critical ideas, and history that made them possible. For example, although Fleming indeed discovered penicillin by “accident,” it is also true that Fleming was able to understand the importance of penicillin mold because he was a trained bacteriologist who had been looking for a substance to fight infection for more than a decade. The effects of mold on some forms of bacteria had been noted several times in the late 19th century by Joseph Lister in 1871, John Tyndale in 1875, Louis Pasteur and Jules Joubert in 1877, and Ernest Duchesne in 1897 (Macfarlane, 1985). Fleming was aware of all this research. It does not diminish his achievement to point out that he, like every other inventor or discoverer, did not create something totally new. Rather, he realized the critical importance of new combinations of things that already existed. His culture provided him with the training, tools, and context in which his discovery could be made.

Recently, composer Anthony Brandt and neuroscientist David Eagleman (2017) have described creativity as a process of bending, breaking, and blending. We bend things when we take something that already exists and provide a new variation or twist, like a jazz musician creating a new interpretation of a classic tune. We break things when we take them apart to create something new. For example, in cubist painting, solid objects are broken into their parts and placed in new perspectives. In genetic engineering, strands of DNA are broken apart and reassembled. Blending is bringing two or more different ideas together. The smartphones that most of us carry are examples of blending. A phone used to be an instrument used for the sole purpose of talking to other people in real time. We now use our phones for everything from creating and consuming entertainment to shopping and financial management to dating apps and social media.

All innovations involve human ingenuity and creativity, and these exist in the same quantity in all societies. However, even geniuses are limited by the nature of their cultures. Had Einstein been born among a group that did not have Western notions of science, he could never have found the theory of relativity. If Beethoven had been a Bororo (a member of a Brazilian hunting, gathering, and gardening group), he would never have composed a symphony. An old cliché has it that we all stand on the shoulders of giants. This means that everyone in a culture builds on what has gone before.

Innovations tend to move from one culture to another. This process is known as **diffusion** and can happen in many ways: Trade, travel, and warfare all promote it. Direct contact among cultures generally results in the most far-reaching changes. Because of this, cultures located on major trade routes tend to change more rapidly than those in more isolated places. However, because no human society has ever been isolated from all others for a long time, diffusion has always been an important factor in culture. This implies that “pure” cultures, free from outside influences, have never existed.

Innovation and diffusion are not simple processes. People do not “naturally” realize that one way of doing things is better than another or that one style of dress, religion, or behavior is superior. For innovation and diffusion to occur, new ideas must be accepted, and that is a very complex process. The discovery of penicillin again provides a good example. Although Fleming understood some of the importance of his discovery in 1928, he was not able to purify the drug and he believed that it was only useful for infections on the skin’s surface. It wasn’t until 1940 that Howard Florey and Ernst Chain were able to purify penicillin and show that it could be used to cure internal bacterial infections. Penicillin was used extensively to treat wounded servicemen in the later years of World War II, but American physicians did not commonly prescribe it until the mid-to-late 1950s. After John Sheehan developed the commercial process to manufacture large quantities of the drug in 1958, drug companies played a critical role in popularizing penicillin and promoting its acceptance by often reluctant physicians in the United States and elsewhere (Sheehan, 1982; T. Williams, 1984).

As the example of penicillin shows, even when the desirability of an innovation is very clear, gaining its acceptance is often far from straightforward. Part of the problem may be comprehension. People may not fully understand the new idea or its implications. But, more frequently, other factors lead to slow acceptance of innovation. First, people vary in their willingness to adopt change; some are, by temperament and personal history, early adopters of change. Others are much more conservative. Additionally, innovations do not necessarily benefit all segments of a society, and rarely do they benefit all segments equally. New agricultural techniques, for example, may benefit wealthy landowners but, at the same time, impoverish small family farms. An examination of the green revolution (the use of highly productive and technological farming techniques heavily promoted by the United States and European nations from the 1950s to the 1970s) shows that it did raise yields in many poor nations but also had other, less desirable effects. Large landowners received the greater part of the benefit. However, conditions for others grew worse and worse (Das, 1998). Small landowners found they could neither afford the technologies promoted by the green revolution nor compete with those who could. The many landless laborers found themselves replaced by machinery. Additionally, in some cases, the green revolution caused extensive environmental damage as pesticides and fertilizers poisoned land, waterways, and often workers (Hazell, 2009). Norman Borlaug (1914–2009; Figure 3.14), who won a Nobel Peace Prize as one of the architects of the green revolution, has noted that although food supplies worldwide have increased, tens of millions go hungry because they lack the resources to purchase food (Borlaug, 2000). The same process that increased the food supply impoverished some people, making them unable to purchase food.

Figure 3.14 Norman Borlaug, seen here with a farmworker near Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico, was one of the architects of the green revolution, changes in farming techniques that enabled people to grow much more food but that also provided disproportionate benefit to wealthy landowners and created environmental problems.

© Ted Streshinsky/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

Change is often promoted or resisted by powerful forces. Innovations that have strong political, economic, or moral forces behind them may be rapidly accepted, but when those forces are arrayed against it, an innovation can be profoundly delayed. New technologies may face powerful resistance from those who have invested heavily in older ones. For example, FM radio broadcasting is clearly superior to AM broadcasting; it has greater fidelity and is much less susceptible to static and interference. FM broadcasting was invented in 1933, but because of the resistance of CBS, NBC, and RCA, extremely powerful corporations heavily invested in AM technology, FM did not gain popularity until the late 1960s (T. Lewis, 1991).

Innovations are often altered to fit new cultural settings. Thus, cultural elements that move from one society to another frequently change both form and meaning as they become part of an existing cultural pattern. For example, American football has its origins in British rugby. Football was born when U.S. colleges modified rugby rules in the late 19th century (Oriard, 1993, pp. 26–27), an example of the kind of bending that Brant and Eagleman discussed. In the post–World War II era, football took on new meanings and has now become a central symbol of U.S. culture. Rugby is not nearly as important in British society. We live in a world in which businesses operate simultaneously in many countries and many products are available worldwide. But this superficial similarity may mask deep differences. McDonald’s, for example, operates in more than 100 countries around the world. In most of them, it sells Big Macs® and these have the same ingredients and taste more or less the same wherever they are sold. However, the meaning of eating a Big Mac® may vary a lot from country to country. In some places, it may signify that one has money and is a member of global rather than traditional culture. In others, it may identify a person as a member of the lower middle class.

Like innovation, diffusion is often accompanied by conflict. Cultures often confront one another in war, and people who are captured or colonized by others are forced to assume new cultural practices. New rulers may require that traditions be abandoned. Economic demands by governments or creditors often compel the adoption of new technologies and practices. Although these processes have always happened in places where cultures confront one another, they have been particularly important in the past 500 years. During this time, cultures have been increasingly tied together in an economic system centered in northern Europe, North America, and Japan. The expansion of powers located in these regions has involved the diffusion of many cultural traits to all areas of the world. Such diffusion has sometimes been peaceful, but often it has involved conflict and unspeakable violence (Wolf, 1982). We examine this process more fully in Chapter 15.

The rapid pace of cultural change and diffusion, particularly in the past 100 years, raises the question of cultural homogenization. Are cultural differences being erased? Are we all being submerged in a single global culture? There are no simple answers to these questions. On one hand, modern technological culture now penetrates virtually every place on earth. People in almost every country have access to smartphones, texting, radio, television, and other aspects of modern technology. On the other hand, this access tends to be uneven. Wealth is intertwined with access to technology and communication. People in wealthy countries have much more access to international data flows than people in poor countries. And within countries, wealthier and more highly educated people have more access than the poorer and less educated. It comes as no surprise that the countries with the largest percentages of Internet users are also the world’s wealthiest nations while places with the lowest number of users are some of the poorest (Internet Society, 2018). In the United States, almost 100% of people in households with yearly incomes of $100,000 or more have a smartphone. But only 76% of those with incomes of less than $30,000 do. Ninety-three percent of households earning over $100,000 have home broadband, but only 57% of those earning less than $30,000 do (Vogels, 2021). Although web access may improve the lives of many people throughout the world, it is also one of the forces that increase both homogeneity and inequality within and between nations.

The world dominance of wealthy nations has affected cultures everywhere, but rather than annihilating local culture, the result may be what Ortiz (1947) described as **transculturation**. Cultural traits are transformed as they are adopted, and new cultural forms result. The

Internet and the many websites and applications that make use of it are good examples. The Internet began in the late 1960s as a U.S. Department of Defense project called ARPANET. The World Wide Web began in the 1980s and was based on research done at CERN, a research organization based in Switzerland and funded by European governments. Over the past several decades, it has become a ubiquitous aspect of modern life in places throughout the world. It is used by governments to broadcast messages they want their citizens and the rest of the world to hear. However, it is also used by a great many antigovernment groups. For example, the radical Islamist organization The Islamic State makes extensive use of the Internet. It has published the online magazines *Dar al Islam* and *Rumiyah* and used a wide variety of sophisticated apps, including Hushmail, CyberGhost, and Locker, to promote its message and keep in touch with its members (Velocci, 2016). The group has also employed hackers to conduct malware campaigns against both individuals and institutions they view as enemies (Frenkel, 2016). Thus, the tools originally developed by projects funded by the U.S. and European governments have easily been turned against those societies.

The Internet also clearly plays an important role in politics in the United States. Virtually every political campaign now makes extensive use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In 2016, this influence became evident as both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump made extensive use of social media and the Internet. But so did people around the world, often high school students, who saw an opportunity to make money by writing false news articles for the American public. False stories about the candidates originating in Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Georgia (the nation, not the U.S. state) earned small fortunes for their authors, who had no interest in the elections beyond earning money (Higgins et al., 2016; Kirby, 2016). Russia, which did have an interest in the election’s outcome, used a wide variety of web-based tools to try to influence it. Since 2016, the Internet has become a powerful source of information and misinformation. This was particularly true during the Covid-19 pandemic when campaigns of misinformation discouraged people from getting vaccines that may have saved their lives and encouraged the use of unproven and sometimes fatal treatments. The Internet and social networking tools were certainly not created with these uses in mind. However, people’s ideas and inventions have far-reaching and often unintended consequences. Individuals and institutions use tools and traits for their own purposes.

Anthropology began in the 19th century, an era of great social change, so even though anthropologists sometimes imagined some non-Western societies as static, they were always interested in change. As the pace of change has accelerated, so too has anthropological interest in it. Today, large numbers of anthropologists are engaged in studying change in a variety of ways. Some are directly involved in change: promoting and defending the interests of the people they study, working for governments and private agencies that promote social change, and sometimes working for corporations as well. They bring many different theoretical tools to the study of change. They often combine ideas from postmodernist and interpretivist anthropology with those from economics, Marxist anthropology, and ecology to create new complex analyses that help us understand our dynamic and changing world.

Conclusion: Culture Counts

Culture is many different things. It is learning, symbolism and meaning, patterns of thought and behavior, the things we share with those around us, the ways in which we survive in our world, and dynamism and change. It incorporates both consensus and conflict. Culture makes us human and ties us to others everywhere. Enormous variability is built into the patterns of culture. The fact that human lifeways are shared, learned, and symbolic, that we don’t simply adapt to our environment but fill it with meaning, results in extraordinary differences in human cultures. However, because all societies are based around these fundamental cultural patterns, no society is utterly incomprehensible to members of another.

In the opening paragraphs of this book, we defined culture as the answers people have devised to the basic questions of human social life. These questions concern things such as how to feed oneself, how to live with other groups, and how to lend meaning to life. As they consider ways to explore and understand these cultural answers, anthropologists look at different aspects of culture. The studies they do reflect the facets of culture they choose to explore. In this chapter, we have described some of these different ways of looking at culture. Taken together, they do not make up a unified whole but rather involve contending views of what it means to be human.

Anthropologists are always involved in fractious debate over the nature of culture and the proper ways to study and describe it. However, as Clifford Geertz has written, “Anthropology … draws the greater part of its vitality from the controversies that animate it. It is not much destined for secured positions and settled issues” (1995, p. 4). By thinking about the nature of culture, we arrive at new understandings of ourselves and our subject matter. We come to a keener appreciation of the nature of culture and, ultimately, what it means to be human.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: IS THERE AN AMERICAN CULTURE?

Are Americans members of a single culture? If so, what are its characteristics?

Throughout this chapter, we have identified culture as something shared by a group of people. This is a necessary aspect of culture. However, it is also problematic. We often think of groups as neat, bounded collections of individuals or families. But think for a moment: How many groups do you belong to? You almost certainly have a nationality, a place where you grew up, a college or university (potentially more than one), perhaps an ethnic identity, perhaps a religious identity, maybe you were or are a member of a group like the military, and, of course, you certainly have a family identity. These identities overlap but are different. All of them have characteristics of culture such as processes of enculturation and symbolism. Now, which of them is your culture? No one on the planet shares precisely your cultural experience. Even identical twins don’t end up with identical lives. So, are you then a culture of one?

The problem of culture is particularly acute when we talk about very large and complex groups. The United States is a nation of more than 330 million people who have different geographical origins, ethnicities, beliefs, sexualities, and so on. New immigrants and visitors from other cultures may have a very different view of American culture, too. Further, over the past several decades, Americans have tended to move to areas where people share their political views and often their ethnicity or race. For example, the presidential election of 1976 pitted Democrat Jimmy Carter against Republican Gerald Ford. Then, only about 27% of Americans lived in “landslide counties,” places where Carter either won or lost by at least 20%. In the 2016 presidential election, however, 62% of Americans lived in landslide counties that voted for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton by more than 20%. In rural America, the pattern was even more dramatic: almost 80% of rural voters live in landslide counties. The percentage of landslide counties declined slightly in the 2020 presidential election, but the overall pattern remains (Bishop, 2020). The phenomenon of Americans choosing to live in places where people share their views (and often other characteristics) is sometimes called The Big Sort (Bishop, 2009). In a vast, diverse country where divisions among people seem to be increasing, can there really be anything such as American culture?

If the question is “Are there things upon which 100% of Americans agree?” then the answer is almost certainly no. It’s difficult if not impossible to find that kind of consensus even in a very small community. However, as we have seen in this chapter, discord, argument, and even violence are not aberrations; they are common parts of all cultures. To have a culture, we don’t all need to agree, but we do need to share some things, not in the sense that we all partake of them equally, but rather that we overwhelmingly have some significant connection with them.

So what kinds of things do Americans share? There’s no definitive list, but here are some ideas. We share and are shaped to some degree by the critical institutions of our society: the federal government, court system, and education system. Although many languages are spoken in the United States, we are overwhelmingly an English-speaking nation, and, historically, virtually all grandchildren of non-English-speaking immigrants are monolingual English speakers.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have proposed a variety of other American characteristics. Anthropologists Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn (1947) described American culture as characterized by “effort optimism”: the belief that if a person tries hard enough at anything, they will succeed. Sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) said that the dominant elements of American culture are utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Utilitarian individualism is the claim that humans have a right to behave in their self-interest, pursuing the satisfaction of their goals, appetites, and fears. Bellah sees this as countered and moderated by expressive individualism, the belief that each person has the right to express a unique core of creativity and individuality. Bellah and others have also noted that ideas such as utilitarian and expressive individualism are reinforced constantly in schools, films, and television. They also work well with American capitalism.

Numerous other attributes have been proposed. A typical list includes things such as the belief that the environment can and should be controlled for the benefit of people, belief that progress is good and that things in the future will probably be better, a strong sense of good and bad (combined with a belief that we can know what is morally good and we should act upon it), the notion that there should be a schedule and that people should stick rigorously to it, a fundamental belief in human equality (often combined with a deep prejudice toward particular groups of people), and the idea that people should be friendly and open. However, we’re sure that you can think of many cases where you and people you know do not behave in ways this list suggests you should. Does this mean that American culture is a fiction or that American culture contains much friction?

Key Questions

1. Do you believe there is such a thing as American culture? Support your position with at least three examples.
2. Briefly explain the connections between values such as effort optimism, utilitarian individualism, and the American economic system.
3. In the future, will Americans be increasingly united by their culture or increasingly divided by it?

SUMMARY

1. What might human beings without culture be like? It’s hard to tell since there are no humans who do not have culture. However, we might gain some insight from people on the autism spectrum who seem to have a different relationship with culture than others.
2. How do anthropologists define culture? Culture is the learned, symbolic, at least partially adaptive, and ever-changing patterns of behavior and meaning shared by members of a group.
3. What is the importance of learning in human cultural behavior? For humans, almost all behavior is at least partially learned; even those things that are biological necessities, such as eating, involve cultural learning.
4. What is the importance of classification and symbols in human cultural behavior? Every culture has a system of classification through which its people identify and organize the aspects of the world that are important to them. Culture is also a collection of symbols and meanings that permit us to understand others, understand ourselves, and experience our humanity. It is the web of significance that gives meaning to our lives and actions.
5. How does the case of Lia Lee illuminate the importance of classification in medical diagnosis? Doctors and Lia’s parents understood and classified her symptoms in very different ways. This resulted in bitter fights over how Lia should be treated and probably resulted in her spending most of her life in a coma.
6. In what ways are cultures like biological organisms, and what are

the problems with this organic analogy? Cultures, like biological organisms, can be thought of as systems composed of interrelated parts. Changes in one aspect of culture result in changes in other aspects as well. However, unlike biological organisms, conflicts between different elements of culture are found in all cultural systems. The parts of cultural systems do not fit together easily or well.

7. What are norms and values? Do people within a culture agree upon them? Norms are shared ideas about the way things ought to be done. Values are shared ideas about what is true, right, and beautiful. Norms and values are not necessarily held consistently by all members of a culture and may not be shared in the same way by all members. Individuals and groups manipulate them, renegotiate them, and do battle over them. Norms and values involve conflict and subjugation as well as accommodation and consensus.
8. How is culture similar to the biological adaptations of nonhuman animals to their environments? Many anthropologists understand culture as the major adaptive mechanism of the human species. Whereas other animals adapt primarily through biological mechanisms, humans satisfy their needs for food, shelter, and safety largely through the use of culture. Cultural adaptation has advantages of speed and flexibility but disadvantages of misinformation and maladaptive practices.
9. How did James Hamilton’s attempt to build a house in Thailand reflect cultural adaptation and maladaptation? Hamilton attempted modifications to Pwo Karen house design to fit American ideas of proper housing. He found that the original design of Pwo Karen homes was well adapted to the environment and the changes he made worked poorly and caused numerous problems.
10. Are there any cultures that are static and unchanging? Cultures are constantly changing. There have been no “Stone Age people” since the Stone Age. Cultural change often occurs as part of the domination of one culture by another. This process has occurred throughout human history, but it has been particularly important in the past few centuries.
11. Define innovation and diffusion and describe their importance to

culture. An innovation is a new variation on an existing cultural pattern. Diffusion is the spread of elements from one culture to another. Both are present in all cultures. However, both depend on cultural context. New cultural traits build upon older traits, and the use and meaning of symbols and objects may change as they move among cultures. Within society, new traits may favor some groups and be opposed by others.

12. Do anthropologists agree on the definition and meaning of culture? Anthropologists argue frequently over the proper definition of culture and the right ways to study and understand it. We make progress in understanding culture through such discussion and debate.
13. Is there such a thing as American culture? The United States, like other large nations, is made up of hundreds of millions of individuals and tens of thousands of groups with competing ideas, interests, and goals. Although there is probably no single "American" trait shared by all American citizens, there may be some shared by a large percentage of them.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Culture depends on learned behavior. What sorts of behaviors do children in the United States learn before the age of 5 and how are these behaviors reflected throughout their lives?
2. No one doubts that elements of culture are related to one another, but clashes between different aspects of culture are common. What parts of your life fit well together and what parts clash?
3. Because everyone's life experiences are different, each person has a different experience of their own culture. How can we reconcile the shared nature of culture with our different experiences of it? What exactly do we share when we share culture?
4. In the early 20th century, anthropologist Clarke Wissler

argued that the oldest cultural traits were those that had diffused most widely from their points of origin. What's wrong with this idea? What promotes or retards the diffusion of cultural traits?

5. Anthropologists argue that culture is unique to human beings, but many other animals live in social groups and have learned behavior. What separates human culture from the behavior of social animals?

Key Terms

adaptation (p. 74)

anthropological theory (p. 58)

diffusion (p. 80)

enculturation (p. 61)

habitus (p. 56)

innovation (p. 78)

norms (p. 71)

plasticity (cultural) (p. 75)

subculture (p. 72)

symbol (p. 58)

transculturation (p. 82)

values (p. 71)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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A globe labeled Russia, Greenland Den, Alaska, U. S, Canada, United States placed over a map depicting Inuit, Russia, Arctic Ocean, Greenland (Den), Alaska (U. S), Pacific Ocean, Anchorage, Juneau, Canada, Vancouver, United States Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto.

4 COMMUNICATION

Human communication includes words, gestures, dress, and other features, as is evident in this interaction between two monks interacting at a temple near Siem Reap, Cambodia.

iStockphoto.com/wanderluster

Learning Objectives

After you have read this chapter, you will be able to:

4.1 Analyze the differences between human language and nonhuman biological communication systems.

4.2 Describe the process by which humans learn language.

4.3 Examine the structure of human language including phonology, morphology, the lexicon, and syntax.

4.4 Discuss the relationship between language and culture.

4.5 Define and compare forms of nonverbal communication including artifacts, haptics, chronemics, proxemics, and kinesics.

4.6 Summarize different ways in which language changes, including the social and political forces that affect language change.

4.7 Analyze the relationship between language and identity, and how they are affected by globalization.

Communication is the act of transmitting a message that influences the behavior of another organism. Communication, and hence interaction, in all animal species, depends on a consistent set of signals by which individuals convey information. These signals are channeled through the visual, olfactory, auditory, and tactile senses.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL COMMUNICATION

Many animals use sounds and movements to share information. Such communication can be quite complex. For example, a scout honeybee uses patterned movements to communicate information about the direction and distance of a field of pollen-bearing flowers to others in its hive. But although bees can say a lot about where flowers are, they cannot say much about anything else. Crows caw as a signal of danger, and crickets chirp when they are ready to mate. Dolphins have signature whistles that enable them to identify each other as individuals (Janik & Slater, 1998). Among primates, far greater amounts of information can be transmitted about many more subjects.

Although communication among nonhuman animals is critical to their survival, it is quite limited compared with human language. An animal system of verbal communication is referred to as a **call system** (Figure 4.1). These systems are restricted to a set number of signals generally uttered in response to specific events. Human language, on the other hand, whether spoken, signed, or written, is capable of recreating complex thought patterns and experiences in words. Our linguistic abilities allow enormous variety in how we act, think, and adapt to our surroundings.

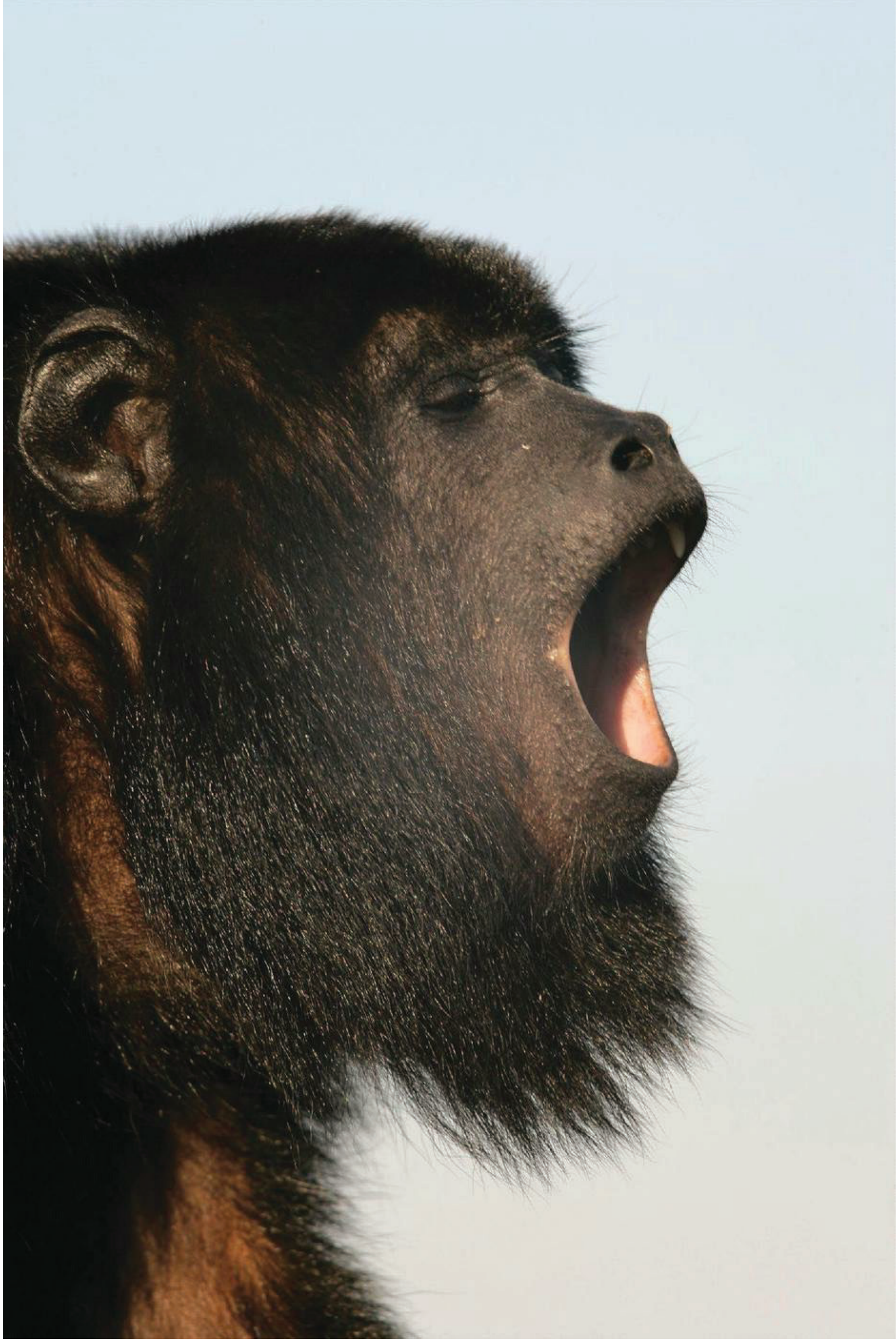

Figure 4.1 Howler monkeys, found in South America, have sophisticated vocalizations that include sounds that primatologists refer to as the “incipient roar” the “male woof” and the “oodel.” Linguists refer to animal vocalizations as “calls.”

Avalon/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

Human language is first and foremost a system of symbols. As discussed in the last chapter, a symbol is just something that stands for something else. Words are symbols, and they only stand for things, actions, and ideas because speakers of a language agree that they do, a feature of human language called **conventionality**. An animal is no more a dog than it is a *chien* (French), a *perro* (Spanish), or a *kutta* (Hindi).

This seemingly trivial fact is critical for two reasons. First, because the relationship between a series of sounds (a word) and its meaning is symbolic, relatively few sounds can be used to refer to an infinitely large number of meanings. For nonhuman animals, there is a direct connection between a sound and its meaning; 60 sounds equals 60 meanings. Most human languages have only 30 to 40 different sounds. However, used in combination, these sounds can produce an endless variety of words and meanings. The linguist Charles Hockett referred to this as “duality of patterning” (Hockett, 1973, p. 106). He argued that every human language has a pattern of sounds and a pattern of meanings. As an example of what Hockett meant, consider the old joke: Did you hear about the agnostic, dyslexic insomniac who lay awake all night wondering whether or not there was a dog? The humor relies on two facts: First, dog and god are composed of identical sounds (and in this case letters as well) arranged in a different order. Second, at least as far as we know, there is no logical relationship between the two. The first fact corresponds to Hockett’s first level of patterning, the second to his second level. Because of our ability to combine and recombine sounds to produce different meanings, there is no maximum number of words or sentences in any human language. People constantly create new ones, a characteristic known as **productivity**.

Second, symbols enable humans to transmit and store information, a capacity that makes our cultures possible. If humans had to learn everything they know by trial and error or by watching others, our lives would be vastly different and much simpler than they are. Human beings do learn by these methods, but they also learn by talking.

Among other animals, communication is generally about the present: A particular thing is in a particular place at this particular time. Humans, on the other hand, can talk about the particular (“The tree in front of my house needs trimming”) and the general (“Trees provide shade”). We can move our language in time (“Before the fire, the trees in this forest were enormous.”) and in space (“I wonder if we could grow trees on Mars?”). We can even move in and out of reality. Harry McClintock (1884–1957), for example, imagined “the buzzing of the bees in the cigarette trees” in the hobo paradise of Big Rock Candy Mountain.[1] We tell each other our experiences and pass down the things we have learned from our elders. We discuss the past, plan for the future, and make up stories using words. This human ability to speak about different times and places is called **displacement**.

[1] You can hear Pete Seeger sing “Big Rock Candy Mountain” at https://youtu.be/k1qRCIaU5Pg. Provided to YouTube by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

In all cultures, language allows us to store enormous amounts of information. In cultures with writing, the information stored symbolically can be incredibly vast. Consider, for example, that no one individual could possibly know everything written in the books in even a relatively small university library. However, because we can store our knowledge symbolically as words, we can have access to everything that is there. And with the Internet … well, you get the point!

ORIGINS AND ACQUISITION OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Like the communication systems of all animals, human language reflects the character of our adaptation. Language and human culture evolved together. The more elaborate the culture of our human ancestors grew, the more complex the system of communication among them had to become. Conversely, increases in the sophistication of communication led to increases in the complexity of culture (Salzmann, 1993, p. 88).

Estimates of when language emerged vary tremendously. Certainly, our most distant ancestors communicated, but they probably used call systems similar to those of modern-day primates. Some believe that language might have begun as early as 2 million years ago, at the time of the emergence of the genus *Homo* (see Schepartz, 1993, p. 119), but most anthropologists think that language has been limited to members of our own species. The earliest *Homo sapiens* date from about 200,000 years ago, and language may well have emerged at that time. A third position holds that language emerged about 50,000 years ago, in connection with a big jump in the sophistication of human toolmaking and symbolic expression (Bickerton, 1998). Quentin Atkinson (2011) used a statistical model to place the origins of modern language in Africa between 80,000 and 160,000 years ago, but others are skeptical of his methods (Berdicevskis & Piperski, 2011).

Whichever date is correct, anthropologists generally agree that language is part of our biological adaptation. It is more than simply a capacity or ability. People have the capacity or ability to learn skills like algebra or ice skating. They may or may not do it, as their culture and their individual choices dictate. Language is different. Unless prevented by total social isolation or physical incapacity, all humans learn their first language as part of the developmental process of childhood. All go through the same stages, learning language in the same sequence and at roughly the same speed, regardless of the language being learned. Although some people in any culture talk with greater or lesser artistry than others, all physiologically normal individuals in every culture develop adequate language skills.

Our use of language rests on certain features of human biology. The visual and auditory areas of the human brain are directly connected, and both are connected to the brain region concerned with touch. Thus, human children can make the association between the visible image, the feel of an object, and the sound pattern or word used to designate it. Furthermore, the structure of the human air and food tract is different from that of our closest ape relations. Among apes, food and air pass through separate passageways. As any person who has ever tried to speak while eating knows, the food and air tracts are connected in humans. This increases the possibility of choking but also greatly expands our ability to make different sounds.

Humans have what Steven Pinker (1994) called a “language instinct.” However, Pinker points out that the language instinct in humans is very different from instinctive communication in other animals. Among animals, the instinct for communication means that patterns of communication are the expression of underlying genetic codes. Dogs do not learn to wag their tails when they are content and growl when they are angry; these innate behaviors are dictated by canine biology. Dog behavior is species-wide. A growl means the same thing to a dog in Vladivostok as it does to a dog in Manhattan. But language is not instinctual in this way. Instead, the human instinct is to learn the language of the group into which the individual is socialized. There is no biological basis for learning one language over another; for example, an infant born to French-speaking parents but raised in an English-speaking family has no predisposition to speak French.

If you are wondering what language a human being would speak if they were raised without any language, several anecdotes report historical experiments in which just this was done. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, wrote that to learn the original language of humankind, the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus (664–610 BCE) ordered two infants reared where they could hear no human voices. Psammetichus assumed that the children would “naturally” manifest the language that was innate to all humans. To his ears, their babbling sounded like Phrygian (Phrygia was an ancient kingdom located in what is today west-central Turkey), which he concluded was the original human language. According to Robert Lindsay (1532–1580), King James IV (1473–1513) tried a similar experiment, and he claimed that the two infants spoke Hebrew (1749, p. 190). Biblical scholars of his time asserted that Adam and Eve had spoken Hebrew, and people believed that it was the original, natural language of all humans. Although Psammetichus interpreted what he heard as Phrygian and James IV interpreted what he heard as Hebrew, all modern evidence shows that such children were not speaking any intelligible language. Research shows that a child raised in isolation, without language around them, will not spontaneously speak in any language.

Although it has a clear biological basis, speech must be learned as part of a **speech community**, a group of people who share a set of norms and rules for the use of language (Romaine, 1994, p. 22). The need for community is illustrated by cases of children brought up in isolation. For example, Genie, a child discovered in the 1970s by social workers in California, had been locked in an attic for the first 12 years of her life and was unable to speak. With training and good living conditions, she rapidly acquired a large vocabulary but never mastered English syntax. For example, she spoke in sentences like “Genie have Momma have baby grow up” (Pinker, 1994, p. 292).

Cases such as Genie’s imply that there is a critical period of language development for humans. All children are capable of learning language before the age of 6, but it becomes increasingly difficult thereafter. You have probably experienced the time-limited nature of the human ability to learn language. All college students (and indeed all people) speak the languages they learned as children with ease and fluency. Most students, however, struggle to learn a new language, and very few will ever learn to speak one with the proficiency of a native speaker.

Studies of how children learn language show that they recognize the sounds of their language within days of birth. By the time children are

6 months old, their babbling includes consonant and vowel sequences and repetitive patterns (Kuhl, 2010). Though 6-month-old children cannot speak, they can recognize words (Choi et al., 2020). Even when children do not understand what they are saying, they can speak grammatically, using the different parts of speech in correct relation to one another (Casasola & Ransom, 2020).

The universality of the process of learning a first language as well as the underlying similarities that unite all human languages led Noam Chomsky and many others to propose that there is a **universal grammar**—a basic set of principles, conditions, and rules that form the foundation of all languages (Chomsky, 1975). Children learn language by applying this unconscious universal grammar to the sounds they hear (Figure 4.2). They process the sequences of words in their parents' speech to figure out their language's grammar. They model their utterances on those they hear until their version matches, or almost matches, the one being used around them.

Figure 4.2 Interaction between infants and others is

critical to learning language. By the time children are 6 months old, their babbling includes many of the sounds and sequences of the language that surrounds them.

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Anthropologists point out that speaking is far more than simply learning words and grammar. Children must learn the social rules about how to use language to participate in their society. These rules include when to speak and when not to speak, whom to speak to and in what manner, what to talk about, and many other aspects of performance (Duranti, 1997, pp. 20–21). Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin (1984) examined language acquisition among white middle-class Americans, Samoans, and the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea. They found that parents relate to infants very differently in these cultures. American parents spend a great deal of time talking with their infants, using simplified “baby talk” and encouraging them to speak. They believe that their young children’s utterances are very important. Like most Americans, the Kaluli think quite a bit about the language development of their children. However, they speak to children as if they were adults. Samoans, on the other hand, rarely talk to their infants at all, except for an occasional rebuke. They do not consider the utterances of young children to have any importance. In all three societies, children learn to speak at the same speed and with the same level of competence. However, in each society, children learn different rules about when to speak, who to speak to, their responsibility for the words they say, and other aspects of communication. Thus, although the actual process of learning to produce grammatical speech is largely a function of biology, learning to be a member of a speech community is clearly a function of culture.

THE STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE

Every language has a structure—an internal logic and a system of relationships among its parts. The study of the structure and content of specific languages is called **descriptive or structural linguistics**. Descriptive or structural linguists study language separately from the social context in which speaking takes place. Their work suggests that the structure of any language consists of three subsystems: **phonology**, a system of sounds; **morphology**, a system for creating words from sounds; and **syntax**, a system of rules for combining words into meaningful sentences. Additionally, all languages have a **lexicon**, the total stock of words in the language.

Phonology

At a very basic level, all language is made up of sounds, and humans use a vast array of sounds in their languages. **Phonology** is the study of the sounds that humans use in language. Table 4.1 presents a summary of different sounds that humans make. The distinctions are described in this section. The total set of sounds that are used in all the world's languages is called the set of **phones**. A system of writing called the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)** has been devised to represent all these sounds in writing. The IPA has more than 100 base symbols that can be altered by 55 modifiers.

Table 4.1 Table of Human Sounds

Term	Definition	Example
Sound	Any noise that a person can make, whether used in language or not	A person imitating a dog or elephant
Phone	A sound used in any human language	/p/, /f/, /s/, /k!/, /kǁ/ (The last two represent different click sounds that are found in languages like Xhosa but not in English.)
Phoneme	Member of the collection of sounds used in a specific linguistic community	Standard Spoken American English phonemes include /p/,

		/f/, and /s/ but do not include /k!/ and /kǁ/
Allophone	Two or more different phones that can be used to make the same phoneme in a specific language. The differences between allophones do not contribute to distinctions of meaning.	In Standard Spoken American English, the /p/ in pin and the /p/ in spin or the /t/ in Tom and the /t/ in water

Sounds used in one language may be absent in other languages. **Standard Spoken American English (SSAE)** is the version of English used in professional communication in the United States and taught in most schools there. SSAE does not use the rolled r sound common in Spanish or the guttural /ch/ sound common in German. Conversely, the /th/ sound common in English (for example, in the word “the”) does not exist in most other European languages. In addition, combinations of sounds are used in different ways in different languages. For example, an English speaker can easily pronounce the /ng/ sound in “thing” at the end of an utterance but not at the beginning; however, this sound is used in the initial position in Bambara, a language of Africa. The words “thing” and “ngoni” (the name of a musical instrument in Bambara; Figure 4.3) use the same /ng/ sound, but although most English speakers say the word “thing” with ease, it is difficult for them to correctly pronounce “ngoni.”

Figure 4.3 Bassekou Kouyate plays ngoni with his band, Ngoni Ba. It is easy for English speakers to pronounce the /ng/ sound at the end of a word, but difficult for most English speakers to pronounce it at the start of a word. However, that position is common in Bambara. If you'd like to hear Ngoni Ba, check out https://youtu.be/t2vQAmySTfw.

C Brandon/Redferns

Humans can make many sounds that are not used in any language and thus are not phones. For example, people may learn to make the sound of an elephant trumpeting. But there is no human language that incorporates that sound as part of a word. Although you may have experienced great difficulty in correctly producing the sounds of a language you are learning, all humans are biologically capable of making all the sounds of the world's languages.

Humans as a species have a single set of phones, sounds used in human languages. However, individual languages use only a small number of this total set. The set of phones used in a single language is referred to as the set of phonemes of that language. An analogy may make help make this clear. The set of phones is like a library to which all languages have access. The phonemes of the language are like the books the language takes from the library. The library has several hundred volumes, but most languages only take 30 to 60 from it. None takes more than about half.

A **phoneme** is the smallest sound unit that distinguishes meaning within a specific language. An example will help to make this clear. In SSAE, the American English accent you generally hear on network news broadcasts, the sound /d/ as in the English word “den” and the sound /th/ in the word “then” are phonemes. The words “den” and “then” have different meanings, and this difference in meaning is indicated by the initial consonant sound (/d/ or /th/). Spanish also uses these sounds, but in Spanish, they are **allophones**, sounds that indicated the same phoneme. Switching between them does not change the meaning of the word. Rather, these sounds are used in different contexts. The /d/ sound often is used at the beginning of a word and the /th/ sound in the middle of a word. Consider the Spanish words “dia,” meaning day, and “nada,” which means nothing. In “dia,” the /d/ is pronounced like the /d/ in “dog.” In “nada,” it is usually closer to the /th/ in “the.” However, this difference doesn’t change meaning. A person who says “dia” with the /d/ phoneme from “nada” will still be understood to be saying “day,” although people may think that the person is saying the word slightly oddly.

Like Spanish, English has many allophones. For example, the English phoneme /t/ includes at least six different phones (Ladefoged, 1982). Consider the /t/ sounds in stick, tick, and little. The /t/ sound in each of these words is different. Say “stick, tick, little.” As you pronounce the /t/ sound in one word after another, you can feel your tongue change position. Now, hold your hand in front of your mouth and say stick and then tick. You will feel a puff of air as you say the /t/ in tick but not when you say stick. This demonstrates that the sounds are different, even though you may have a difficult time describing precisely how. English speakers do not focus on the differences between /t/ sounds. Saying stick with the /t/ sound from tick might sound a little odd but would not change the meaning of the word. The song “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off,” by George and Ira Gershwin, is another great example of allophones in English. The song focuses on the different pronunciations of words such as tomato, either, and pajamas, in each case presenting variation in allophones.[2]

[2] Hear an outstanding version of “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” sung by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong at https://youtu.be/J2oEmPP5dTM.

In many languages, the tones with which vowel sounds are spoken are phonemes. In English and most other European languages, you cannot change the meaning of a word by raising or lowering the tone of a vowel. But languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Wolof, and Oklahoma Cherokee, as well as many others, have tonal systems. In a tonal language, changing the pitch of a vowel changes the meaning of the word. For example, in Mandarin Chinese, the word “ma” (mā), spoken with a high, level tone, means mother. However, the word “ma” (mǎ), spoken so that the pitch of the vowel sound first dips and then rises, means horse. These words sound as different to Mandarin speakers as bat and cat sound to English speakers.[3]

[3] If you’d like to hear and practice the tones of Manderin Chinese, check out this video: https://youtu.be/TnwOEBISYqU. Be sure to try the tongue twister at the end!

Because different speakers have different accents, calculating the precise number of phonemes in any language is difficult and controversial. Most of the world’s languages have between 20 and 40 phonemes. There are, however, some radical departures from this. The languages with the smallest number of phonemes may have only 11 or 12. Mura, an indigenous language from Brazil, is one of these. At the other end of the spectrum, some languages have well over 120 phonemes. For example, some of the Khoisan “click” languages of southern Africa have over 140 (Crystal, 1997).[4] English is believed to have between 40 and 45 phonemes (Clark et al., 2007, pp. 118–124). Perhaps surprisingly, there is no relationship between the number of phonemes in a language and the number of things that can be said in that language. Anything that can be said in Khoisan can also be said in Mura.

[4] If you’d like to hear how “click” languages sound, listen to Sakhile Dube demonstrate at https://youtu.be/WHHGOYu6Fl0. Or listen to the great Miriam Makeba sing “Pata Pata” in her native Xhosa at https://youtu.be/lNeP3hrm__k.

Morphology

All languages are made up of **morphemes**, which are units that have meaning. Words and morphemes are closely related. A **word** is the smallest part of an utterance that can stand alone and still have meaning, but not all morphemes are words. For example, in English, the /s/ sound has meaning in many contexts but is not a word: /s/, as in dogs, means “make plural.” There are many similar examples: un-, as in undo, means “negative”; -er, as in teacher, means “one who does.” Because -s, un-, and -er are not used by themselves but only in association with another unit of meaning, they are called **bound morphemes**. A morpheme that can stand alone, such as “giraffe,” “tower,” or “degree,” is called a **free morpheme**. In each case, the word cannot be divided into smaller units of meaning.

Words may be composed of any number of bound and free morphemes, but languages differ in the extent to which their words tend to have one or many morphemes as well as in their rules for combining morphemes. Some languages, such as English and Chinese, are isolating. They have relatively few morphemes per word, and the rules for combining morphemes are relatively simple. Agglutinating languages, such as Turkish, allow a great number of morphemes per word and have highly regular rules for combining them. Synthetic languages, such as Mohawk or Inuktitut (an Arctic Canadian language), have words with a great many morphemes and complex, highly irregular rules for their combination. In agglutinating or synthetic languages, translating a single word may require an entire English sentence. For example, the Inuktitut word “qasuirrsarvigssarsingitluinarnarpuq” contains 10 morphemes and is best translated as “someone did not find a completely suitable resting place” (Bonvillain, 1997, p. 19).[5]

[5] Learn some Inukitut phrases at https://youtu.be/iPGAbctSHuY.

The Lexicon

A language’s **lexicon** is the total stock of words in the language. Because the lexicon of any culture reflects many of the objects and ideas that are important to that culture, lexicons illustrate the relationship between culture and language. For example, whereas the average American can name only about 50 to 100 species of plants, members of societies based on hunting and gathering or on gardening can typically name 500 to 1,000 species (Harris, 1989, p. 72). Such lexical specialization is not limited to nonindustrial societies. Germans in Munich have a vocabulary of more than 70 words to describe the strength, color, fizziness, clarity, and age of beer (Hage, 1972, cited in Salzmann, 1993, p. 256) (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Languages build vocabularies around ideas and things important to their speakers. Germans in Munich have more than 70 words to describe beer.

Johannes Simon/Getty Images

The lexicon gives us clues to the ways members of a culture understand their physical and social environments. Sometimes, knowing how people use language to classify their world can give us an insider's view of their understandings. This is particularly true concerning families and kinship systems. In English, for example, the term "brother-in-law" can include one's sister's husband, one's spouse's brother, and the husbands of all one's spouse's sisters. The use of a single term for all of these relations reflects the similarity of our behavior toward the men in those different kinship statuses. Hindi, a language of North India, has many separate terms for a brother-in-law. Which term one uses depends first on whether the speaker is male or female. For women, a sister's husband is *behnoi*, a husband's elder brother is *jait*, a husband's younger brother is *deva*, and the spouses of one’s husband’s sisters are *nandoya*. The variety of words in Hindi reflects the fact that a woman treats the members of each of these categories differently. (For more detail, see “Comparing Kin Classification in North India and the United States” in Chapter 10.)

Syntax

Syntax is the arrangement of words to form phrases and sentences. Languages differ in their syntactic structures. In English, word order is important because it conveys meaning. The syntax of the English language gives a different meaning to these two sentences: “The dog bit the man” and “The man bit the dog.” However, word order is not equally important in all languages. In Japanese, the subject and object of a sentence are indicated by word endings, and order is less important. For example, “John gave Mary the book” is translated “*John-san ga Mary-san ni hon o ageta*.” The same word order, with the word endings *ga* and *ni* reversed (“*John-san ni Mary-san ga hon o agata*”), would be “Mary gave John the book.”

When they analyze the syntactic structure of a language, descriptive linguists establish the different form classes, or parts of speech, for that language. All languages have a word class of nouns, but many languages have different subclasses of nouns. These are referred to as **genders**. Gender classification applies to nouns, but in most cases, languages require gender agreement that can include verbs, indefinite and definite articles, and adjectives, all of which must agree with the gender classification of the noun.

Many Americans have some experience of Spanish, French, or another Romance language. In these languages, nouns are classified as either masculine or feminine, so using the word “gender” seems logical. However, the use of gender in linguistics has nothing to do with sex roles. Many languages have genders that are in no way related to ideas about masculine or feminine. For example, German and Latin have a neuter gender, and Kivunjo, a language spoken in East Africa, has 16 genders (Pinker, 1994, p. 27). O’odham (Papago), a Native American language, has only two genders, but rather than masculine and feminine, they are “living things” and “growing things.” Living things include all animated objects, such as people and animals; growing things refer to inanimate objects, such as plants and rocks (Mathiot, 1962).

Applying the rules of grammar turns meaningless sequences of words into meaningful utterances, but sometimes grammar seems to have a meaning of its own. We can recognize a sentence as grammatical even if it makes no sense. To use a now-classic example (Chomsky, 1965), consider the following sentences: “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” “Furiously sleep ideas green colorless.” Both sentences are meaningless in English. But the first is easily recognized as grammatical by an English speaker, whereas the second is both meaningless and ungrammatical. The first sentence has the parts of speech in English in their proper relation to one another, so it seems as if it should make sense. The second sentence does not.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

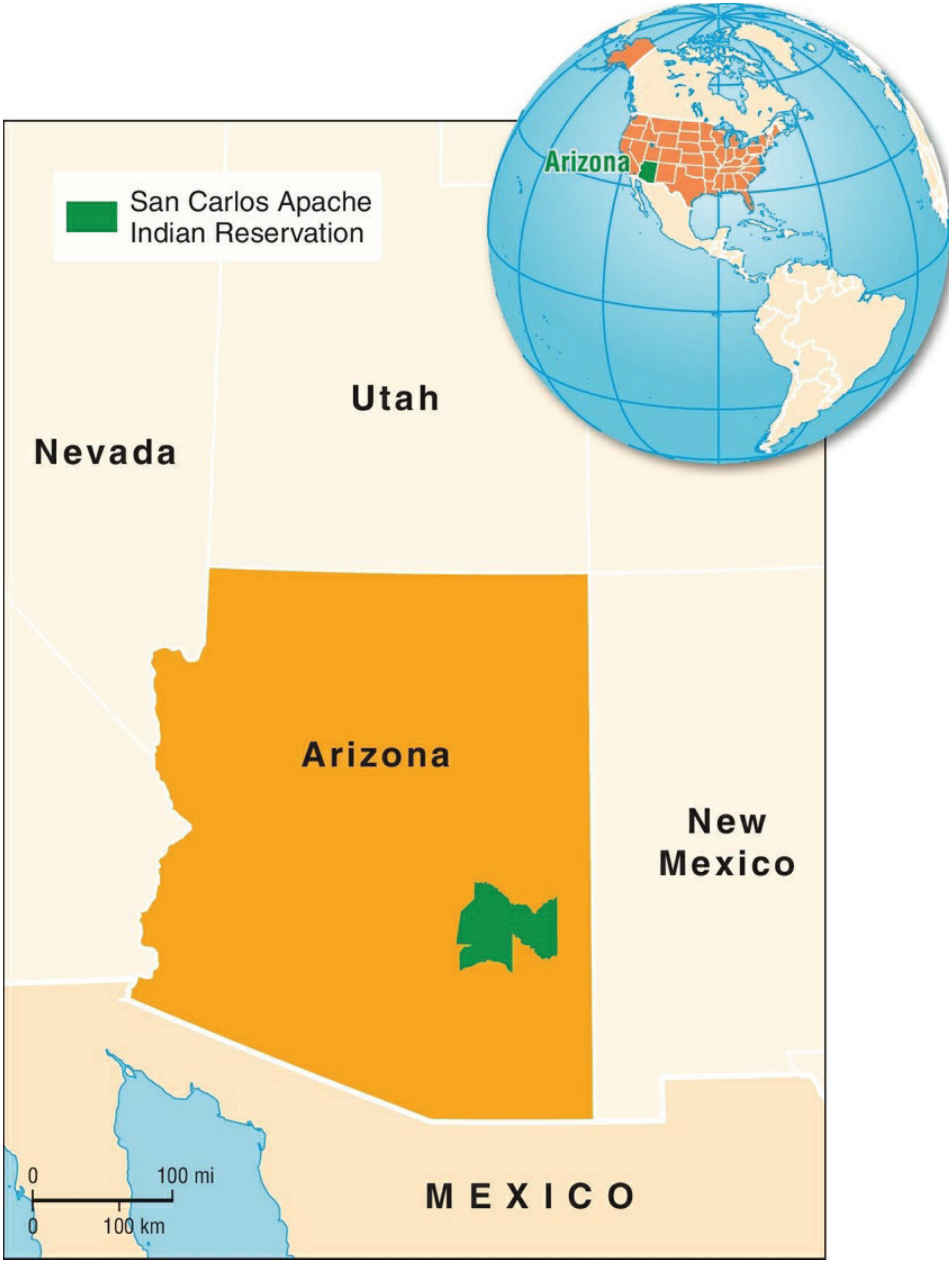
We have been describing the structure of language. However, language is much more than its structure. Anthropologists want to know about the ways in which language conveys cultural meaning. In this study, the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) is important. Saussure was among the founders of **semiotics**, the study of the role of signs and symbols in communication and meaning. He focused his attention on the idea of a sign. A **sign** is anything that can be used to communicate meaning. The Italian essayist and philosopher Umberto Eco said that a sign was anything that could be used to tell a lie (1976, p. 7) —a definition worth thinking about.

Words are signs, but other things can be signs too: events, features of the natural world, physical objects, and so on. For our purposes, we will limit our discussion to words. A sign can be broken into two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the word itself. The signified is the thing, action, or quality to which the word refers.

Consider the word “orchid.” The signifier is the actual sounds we hear when the word is spoken or our recognition of the word on the page. In this case, the signified is a type of flower. However, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is complex. Signifiers have both denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meaning of the word “orchid” is simply a type of flowering plant. But in our culture, an orchid is rarely just a flower. It has complex cultural meanings including exoticism, wealth, beauty, love, sex, and many others. These are some of the connotative meanings of the word “orchid.” The denotative meanings of signs are relatively easy to discover, but the connotative meanings are deeply cultural, are often multilayered, and vary enormously from place to place and time to time.

Saussure also distinguished between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). He argued that *langue* is an arbitrary and abstract system of signs that exists independently of any speaker. *Parole* is the actual performance of language by an individual speaker. Our description of the structure of language has focused on examining *langue*, or language as an abstract system. However, in culture, language is never simply the application of abstract grammatical rules. Spoken language is always a performance. Anthropologists are interested in understanding *parole*: the actual encounters that involve verbal (and also accompanying nonverbal) communication between human beings. Consider the following example of *parole*:

Scene: It’s a clear, hot evening in July on the San Carlos Apache reservation in Arizona. J, a man a bit older than 40 and his wife K, who is 37, have finished their meal. Four of their children play quietly nearby. There is a knock at the door. J rises, answers the knock, and finds L, a man about 5 to 10 years his junior and his “clan brother” standing outside.


San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation
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New Mexico
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Map 4.1 Location of the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation.

J: Hello, my friend! How’re you doing? How are you feeling, L? You feeling good? (J now turns in the direction of K and addresses her.)

J: Look who here, everybody! Look who just come in. Sure, it’s my Indian friend, L. Pretty good, all right. (J slaps L on the shoulder and, looking him directly in the eyes, seizes his hand and pumps it wildly up and down.)

J: Come right in, my friend! Don’t stay outside in the rain. Better you come in right now. (J now drapes his arm around L’s shoulder and moves him in the direction of a chair.)

J: Sit down! Sit right down! Take your loads off you ass. You hungry? You want some beer? Maybe you want some wine? You want crackers? Bread? You want some sandwich? How ‘bout it? You hungry? I don’t know. Maybe you get sick. Maybe you don’t eat again long time. (K has now stopped what she is doing and is looking on with amusement. L has seated himself and has a look of bemused resignation on his face.)

J: You sure looking good to me, L. You looking pretty fat! Pretty good all right! You got new boots? Where you buy them? Sure pretty good boots! I glad. … (At this point, J breaks into laughter. K joins in. L shakes his head and smiles. The joke is over.)

K: Whitemen are stupid.

The joke is over. … So, what was the joke? The joke, from the Western Apache, recorded by Keith Basso (1979, pp. 46–47), is about how the Apache see white people communicating with them and with each other. Also, it plays with the denotative and connotative meanings of signs. In the joke, J pretends he is a white man. The joke depends on the fact that although phrases such as “Are you hungry?” or “Are you sick?” might have similar denotative meanings in white and Western Apache speech, their connotative meanings are very different. White speech, as J presents it, is highly inappropriate and offensive.

For starters, you do not publicly call someone a friend or ask how they are feeling. For white people, these questions connote either polite concern or generic greeting. But for the Western Apache, these are very personal statements and questions. For them, the highly public use of such statements and questions connotes insincerity. The Apache believe that one should enter and leave a room as unobtrusively as possible, so J making a big to-do about L coming into the room is inappropriate as well. Actions such as putting an arm around another man's shoulder or asking repeatedly if he wants something to eat connote friendship and concern among whites, but for the Western Apache, they are signs of both willingness to violate the other's dignity and overwhelming bossiness. To the Apache, such actions suggest that the speaker thinks the person they are talking to is unimportant and that his wishes can be safely ignored. Suggesting that another might be sick is perhaps the worst social gaffe of all. Not only is this a violation of privacy, but the Apache also fear that talking about misfortune may well bring it on. If we knew only the technical grammatical aspects of language, we would never be able to understand J's speech. His performance embodies critical cultural concepts and values. Without understanding Apache culture, an observer cannot possibly get the joke.

Language is so heavily freighted with culture that understanding one is almost always a key to understanding the other. One way anthropologists analyze this relationship is to think in terms of speech performance. Such performance includes what people are saying as well as what they are communicating beyond the actual words. **Sociolinguistics** is the study of the relationship between language and culture. Sociolinguists study speech performances and attempt to identify, describe, and understand how language is used in different social contexts.

The ways in which people speak are highly dependent on the context of their speech as well as on issues such as class, gender, ethnicity, and geography. For example, a public political speech has different purposes and is limited by different norms than a political discussion among friends. Consider Ronald Reagan, elected president in 1980, who ended his 1984 State of the Union Address with the phrase “God bless America,” the first time in modern history that the address has ended that way (Scher, 2015; Figure 4.5). Almost every State of the Union Address since then has ended with the words “God bless America” or something very similar. However, it would be strange if you ended a political discussion with friends with these words. And different cultures have different norms regarding political speeches: who can participate as speaker and audience, the appropriate topics and cultural themes for such a speech, where such speeches can take place, the relationship between the speaker and hearer, the language used in a multilingual community, and so forth.

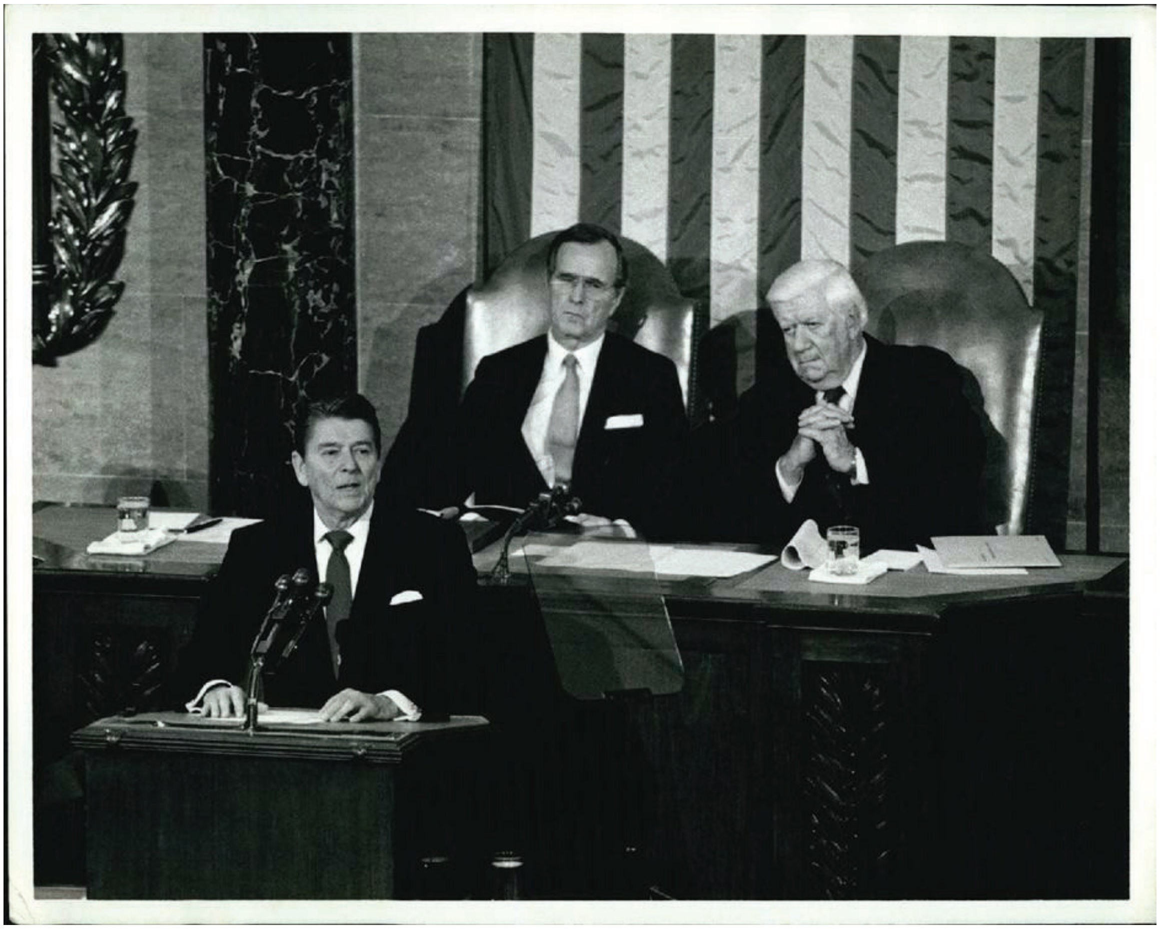

Figure 4.5 Ronald Reagan give the 1984 State of the Union Address, ending his speech with “God bless America,” the first modern use of that phrase in that

context. Every State of the Union Address since has ended with a similar phrase. Behind Reagan, Vice President George H. W. Bush (left) and House of Representatives Majority Leader Tip O’Neill.

Keystone Press/Alamy Stock Photo

Speech is critical in the construction of identity. Penelope Eckert (2000) has studied the way children and adolescents in American schools use language to create and enforce social roles and identities. This process starts with teasing in elementary and junior high schools. It continues for girls in the form of both true and false compliments that establish and enforce social hierarchies and boundaries (Eckert, 2004) and for boys with increased use of language styles specifically opposed by teachers and other powerful adults, including sexual references and obscenities. In high schools, verbal labels indicate social terrain and frequently physical location within the school. In the Detroit high school Eckert studied, the critical labels were jocks and burnouts. Jocks identified with the institution, with adolescence, and with the white suburban middle class. Burnouts saw themselves as opposed to the institution, wanted to be adults, and identified with the urban working class. Jock and burnout groups used language differently: Jock girls were the most standard speakers (i.e., spoke in ways that their English teachers probably approved of), and burnout girls used the most vernacular language (used slang the most). Boys’ language was between these two groups. Burnout girls made frequent use of multiple negatives and other stigmatized speech forms. These differences involved not only the use of different vocabularies but changes in the sounds of the languages they used as well (Eckert, 1989).

In some cultures, different speech forms are used depending on whether the speaker and hearer are intimate friends, acquaintances on equal footing, or people of distinctly different social statuses. French, German, and Yoruba, among many other languages, have formal and informal pronouns that are not found in English. The rules for their use vary among cultures. In France, parents use the informal term to address their children, but children use the formal term to address their parents. In the Spanish spoken in Costa Rica, many people use three forms: The informal *tú* is used by an adult speaking to a child (or lover), the formal *usted* is used among strangers, and the intermediate term *vos* can be used among friends. In India, the status of a husband is higher than that of a wife, and among most Hindi speakers, a wife never addresses her husband by his name (and certainly not in public). Instead, she uses a roundabout expression that would translate into English as something like “I am speaking to you, sir.”

Language and Social Stratification

From a linguistic perspective, all languages are equally sophisticated and serve the needs of their speakers equally well, and every human being speaks with equal grammatical sophistication. Despite this, in complex, stratified societies such as the United States, some speech is considered “correct” and other speech judged inferior.

So, what is good or proper English? Consider the example of the double negative. Almost everyone reading this book has heard someone (perhaps a teacher) claim that a double negative is really a positive. Thus, saying “I don’t want no” is really saying “I want some.” This is simply incorrect. When Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones sings “I can’t get no satisfaction,” no native English speaker believes he is saying how satisfied he is. And no one imagines that the kids chanting “we don’t need no education” in Pink Floyd’s “Another Brick in the Wall” are telling us how much they want to go to school or their desire to have their thoughts controlled.[6] But sometimes two negatives do make a positive, as when a child who refuses to do her homework says, “I won’t not do my homework if you buy me some ice cream.”[7] And two or more positives can sometimes make a negative, as in:

[6] If you’re not familiar with these classic songs, you can find Mick Jagger singing “Satisfaction” at https://youtu.be/nrIPxlFzDi0 and Pink Floyd singing “Another Brick in the Wall” at

https://youtu.be/5IpYOF4Hi6Q.

[7] You can find an outstanding example of this in the song “I’m Not a Loser” from *The SpongeBob Musical*. You can hear the song at https://bit.ly/nw-spongebob.

Speaker A: “Yes, I will do it.”

Speaker B: “Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure you will.”

The point is that from a linguistic perspective, one way of speaking is as good as the next. There is no reason to prefer “I don’t have any money” to “I ain’t got no money,” and there is no reason that saying, “I’m about to go get lunch” is better than saying, “I’m fixin’ to get me some lunch.” All the statements are fully logical, are comprehensible, and communicate the information the speaker desires.

In hierarchical societies, the most powerful group generally determines what is “proper” in language. Indeed, the grammatical constructions used by the social elites are considered language, whereas any deviation from them is often called a dialect (Figure 4.6). **Dialects** are versions of languages that deviate from the grammatical constructions and pronunciations used by the elites in any linguistic community. Because the power of the speaker, rather than any inherent qualities of a speech form, determines its acceptability, linguists sometimes say that a language is “a dialect with an army and a navy” (see Bright, 1997, p. 469).

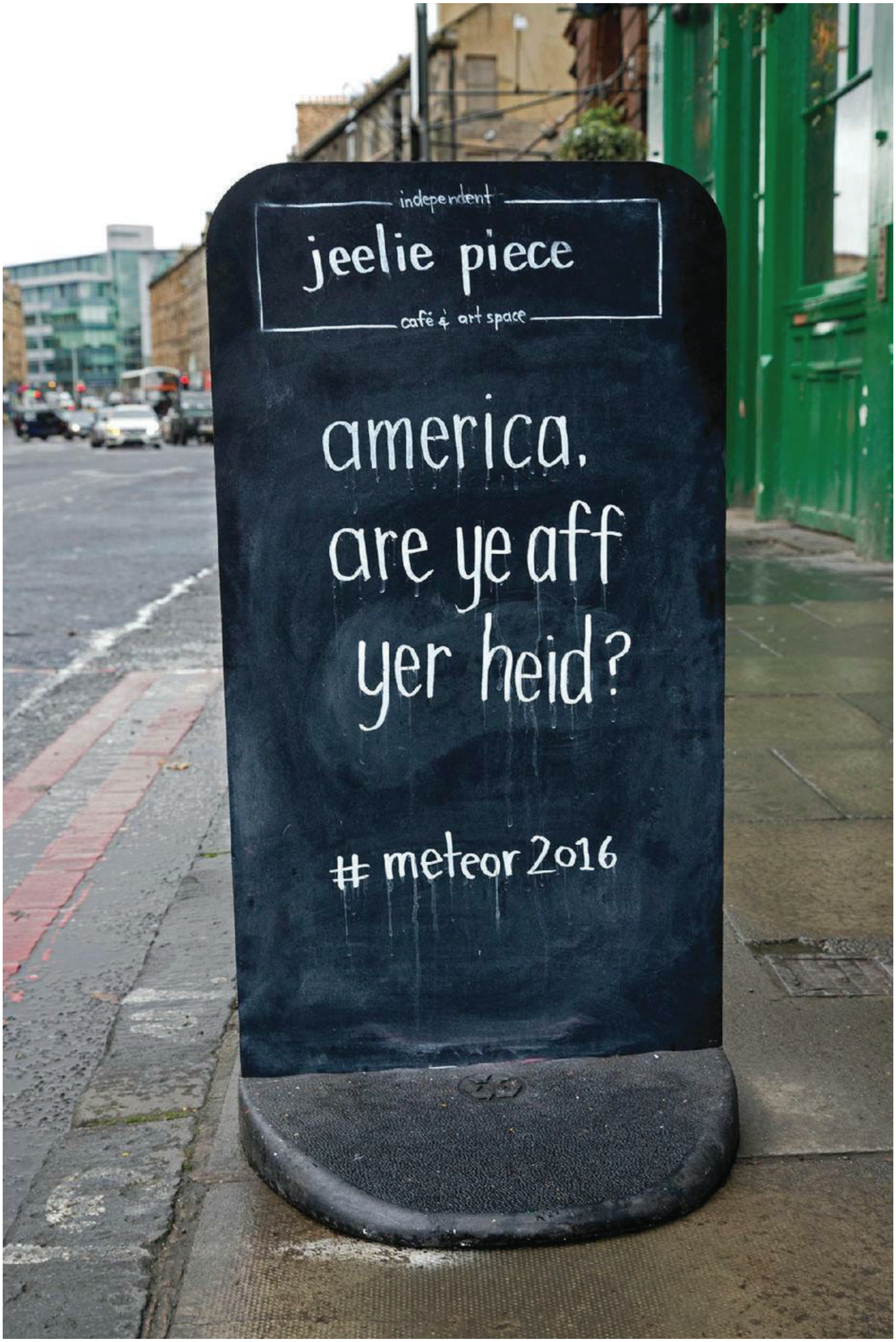
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Figure 4.6 Dialects are versions of languages that deviate from the grammatical constructions and pronunciations used by the elites. A sign outside a club in Glasgow, Scotland, asks an important question in Scots dialect.

Alan Wilson/Alamy Stock Photo

The relation of language usage to social class and power is reflected in the speech of different social groups in the United States. In a classic study, sociolinguist William Labov (1972) noted that elites and working-class people have different vocabularies and pronounce words differently. The forms associated with higher socioeconomic status are considered “proper,” whereas forms spoken by those in lower socioeconomic statuses are considered incorrect and are stigmatized.

Labov found that speakers often vary their vocabulary and pronunciation in different contexts and that the degree of such variation is related to the speaker’s social class. At the bottom and top of the social hierarchy, there is little variation: Elites use privileged forms of speech, and the poor use stigmatized forms. However, members of the lower middle class often use stigmatized forms in casual speech but privileged forms in careful speech. One interpretation of this is that people at the bottom and top of the social hierarchy do not vary their speech because their social position is stable; the very poor do not believe they have much chance to rise, and the wealthy are secure in their positions. Members of the lower middle class, however, are concerned with raising their social position and, in consequence, copy the speech patterns of the wealthy in some social situations. However, they are also concerned with maintaining connections to family and friends and therefore use stigmatized speech with them. Labov’s study makes clear what many of us know but do not like to admit: We do judge a person’s social status by the way they speak. What we say and how we say it are ways of telling people who we are socially or, perhaps, who we would like to be.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Although there are many stigmatized variants of American English, including Appalachian English, Dutchified Pennsylvania English, Hawaiian Creole, Gullah, and emergent Hispanic Englishes, one of the most stigmatized is **African American Vernacular English (AAVE)**. AAVE is a form of English spoken by many African Americans, particularly those of rural or urban working-class backgrounds. AAVE has deep roots in the African American community, particularly among rural and urban working-class Blacks. Although not all African Americans speak it, AAVE has become emblematic of Black speech in the minds of many Americans.

AAVE is simply a variant of Standard English, neither better nor worse than any other. However, it has been a particularly influential one. It's had a deep affect on American art, speech, literature, and music. Linguist Chi Luu notes that Black English has slid "seamlessly into the language of art, music, poetry, storytelling, and social media. Perhaps no other variety of speech has been quite so significant, innovative, and influential to the development of standard American English" (Luu, 2020). A 2018 study of the appearance of new words on social media found that three of the five new patterns of word use the researchers identified had their sources in the African American community (Grieve et al., 2018, p. 313).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a group of linguists, psychologists, and educators known as cultural deficit theorists argued that African American children did poorly in school because of general cognitive deficiencies in which language played a key role. They argued that what they thought of as poor speech of these children, which they claimed was coarse, simple, and irrational, was due to a culturally deprived home environment (Ammon & Ammon, 1971). They proposed that if people could be taught to speak Standard English, they would be able to think more logically, and this would help lift them from poverty (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Engelmann & Engelmann, 1966).

The work of William Labov and others was central to debunking the arguments of the deficit theorists. Through analysis of dialogues, Labov showed that inner-city Black speech, particularly the speech of children living in poverty, was no more or less complex, rational, or orderly than that of other English speakers. It simply followed different rules, many of which were also found in other languages. For example, while SSAE uses the word “there” as a meaningless subject (as in “If there is a God …”), AAVE uses the word “it” (as in “If it is a God …”). Like SSAE, AAVE allows certain kinds of contractions. For example, in both, you may contract the verb “to be.” However, you do it in different ways. In SSAE, for instance, “you are” may be replaced with “you’re,” or “I am” may become “I’m.” In AAVE, the verb “are” may be left out entirely. Thus, “If you are bad” may be replaced with “If you bad” (Pinker, 1994, p. 30). But AAVE isn’t a simplified version of SSAE; it has constructions that SSAE lacks. For example, it has a future perfect tense of disapproval as in “I’ll be done left if she tries getting here late again” (McWhorter, 2021). Labov and many others have demonstrated that AAVE is just a different way of speaking, and from a linguistic point of view, it is neither better nor worse than any other.

Even though AAVE is simply a language like any other, it is stigmatized in American society. Marcyliena Morgan noted that people in families that speak both AAVE and SSAE don’t necessarily value one over the other. In fact, AAVE may deliver “formal and informal knowledge as well as local knowledge and wisdom” (Morgan, 2002, p. 66). However, they are also aware that AAVE is stigmatized and symbolizes deviance and ignorance in the dominant cultural system. SSAE, on the other hand, symbolizes normality and intelligence.

Through school, exposure to mass media, and the need to work in the world outside the local community, most speakers of AAVE become effective speakers of several varieties of English. Like others who are bilingual, they must engage in code-switching. **Code-switching** is the ability of speakers to move seamlessly between two languages. Those who code-switch use each language in the setting that is appropriate to it. For example, speaking about Black women in America, Charisse

Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden wrote, “They shift ‘white’ at the office, in the classroom, when addressing the community board during a public forum; and they shift ‘black’ at church, during book club meetings, among family and friends” (2003, p. 7).

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Forensic Linguistics

Everyone speaks with an accent. That is, they speak their language with a particular set of phonemes. Most native speakers of American English can use these accents to guess at some of the characteristics of the speaker: their geographical origin and perhaps their ethnic background. In addition to marking group membership, our speech and our writing contain mannerisms that are ours alone. We may favor certain words or combinations of words. We may even use particular forms of punctuation. Forensic linguistic anthropologists use the details of speech and writing to provide legal evidence in a wide variety of situations.

Immigration and customs officials often make use of linguistics experts to find out if the accent, slang, and idiomatic expressions used by asylum seekers are the same as those of the countries they claim to be from. Information identifying the regional origin of an individual can play an important role in criminal investigation as well. For example, forensic linguist Roger Shuy helped solve a kidnapping in Illinois. In this case, the kidnapper had left a ransom note that instructed that money be left in a trash can on the devil’s strip at a street corner. Shuy knew that there is only one place in the United States where the term “devil’s strip” is used to identify the small grass area sometimes found between a sidewalk and the street: Akron, Ohio. There was only one suspect from Akron and, when confronted with this evidence, he confessed (Hitt, 2012; Dahl, 2008).

In some cases, forensic linguists may be able to identify a particular individual rather than just the region a person comes from. For example, in 2006, Garry Weddell, a police inspector who lived near London, claimed he came home to find that his wife Sandra, a nurse, had committed suicide, leaving a typed suicide note. However, police were suspicious about the cause of death. A forensic linguist examined the suicide note and compared the wording and sentence structure to diaries and other writings by Sandra and Garry Weddell. The linguist concluded that it was extremely unlikely that Sandra Weddell could have written the suicide note but that the writing was a good match for her husband’s (Wright, 2008; Narayanaswami, 2010). Garry was arrested for the murder of his wife.

Forensic linguistics is often extremely important in determining what is said in voice recordings. Such recordings are problematic because a lot of meaning in conversation is carried in visual expression, hand gestures, and other nonverbal aspects of communication. These aspects are missing in such recordings. Additionally, we tend to hear what we want to hear: Our existing ideas and prejudices can deeply affect how we interpret what is said. In this circumstance, forensic linguists’ close attention to the specifics of phonetics can often clarify meaning, sometimes reversing what people think they hear (Hitt, 2012).

Forensic linguistics is a powerful tool but needs to be used cautiously. Attempts at detection based on writing can sometimes fail spectacularly. For example, in 2003, English professor Donald Foster, who had used a literary forensics technique to reveal the author of an anonymously published popular book, claimed to have used the same technique to discover the identity of the person who sent anthrax spores to the offices of politicians and news media in 2001, killing 5 and infecting 17 others (Foster, 2003). However, Steven Hatfill, the man identified, was innocent and later sued both Foster and the magazines that published the article (Freed, 2010). It may be fine for amateurs to speculate on the authorship of literary works, but court cases really demand careful work by highly trained professionals.

The Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis

The close relationship between culture and language raises interesting questions about the connections between language and thought. In the previous section, we pointed out that in the 1950s and 1960s, some social scientists believed, incorrectly, that AAVE was less logical than SSAE and that as a result, AAVE speakers thought illogically. In so doing, they assumed a strong relationship between speaking and thinking. The existence of such a relationship is an old and controversial idea in anthropology. It is often associated with the work of Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941). Sapir and Whorf believed that languages played a critical role in creating and shaping the social and physical world in which people lived and that languages guided people's understandings of that world (Sapir, 1949, p. 162). In other words, they suggested that we perceive the world in certain ways because we talk about the world in certain ways. They argued that even ideas such as time, space, and matter are conditioned by the structure of our languages. If this is so, it follows that people who speak different languages necessarily understand the world in different ways. This idea came to be known as the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**.

There are unquestionably some connections among language, perception, and thought. We clearly choose our words to guide and direct others' thoughts. Politicians, for example, routinely search for derogatory words and phrases to characterize their opponents. Or consider the term "side effect." A side effect is an unwanted consequence of something such as a drug. However, the term "side effect" encourages us to think of it as something off to the side and therefore less important than the central effect of the drug. What is effect and what is side effect can change according to the use of the drug. For example, diphenhydramine is a chemical compound that both slows down allergic reactions and makes those who take it sleepy. It is the main ingredient in both the allergy relief medicine Benadryl® and the sleep aid Unisom® (Figure 4.7). In the first, the effect is allergy relief and the side effect is sleepiness. In the second, the effect is sleepiness and the side effect is a dry mouth, nose, or throat.

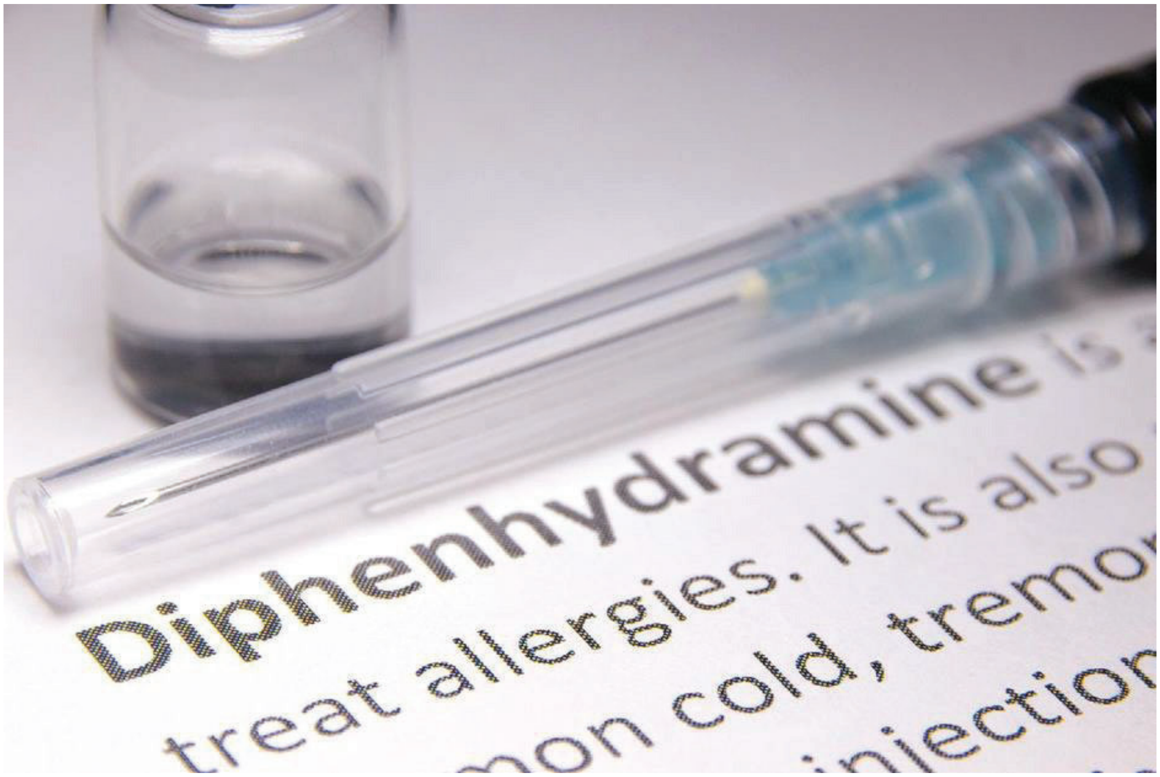

Figure 4.7 Calling something a side effect draws attention away from it. Diphenhydramine, usually in tablet or capsule form, is used in different medicines for both allergy relief and sleep. What is effect and what is side effect depends on the intended use.

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The use of the term “side effect” encourages us to think in a certain way. But does it force us to think in that way? In the late 1950s and early 1960s, thalidomide was prescribed to calm the stomachs of pregnant mothers. The drug was effective but had the horrible side effect of causing severe deformities in babies born to those mothers. Calling the deformities side effects did not prevent people from thinking that they were more important than the drug's effect. In fact, the thalidomide cases led to special testing of drugs prescribed during pregnancy. The thalidomide example shows us that words cannot force people to think in one way or another. Even a government that controlled all the words people used could not control their thoughts. The meaning of words is unstable. People merely use new words or give the old ones new and ironic meanings. For example, if we say that something is "bad," is that positive or negative? It depends on the context. Or consider the word "terrific." In its early uses, it referred to something that caused terror. John Milton used it this way in *Paradise Lost* in 1667. In the mid-20th century, most of the time, something that was "terrific" was good and pleasurable. If you described a movie you had just seen as "terrific," no one would think that you meant that you felt terror while watching it. They would most likely conclude that you liked the movie. People wanted to have "terrific" experiences.

The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis went well beyond the issue of word choice. Its proponents argued that the grammatical structure of languages compelled their speakers to think and behave in certain ways. Whorf claimed, for example, that because tenses in the Hopi language were very different from tenses in English, Hopi speakers necessarily understood time in ways very different from English speakers (Whorf, 1941). The position that languages compel their speakers to have certain understandings and prevent others is sometimes called strong determinism, and it has some serious problems. For example, consider the differences in the way we speak about missing a person in English and French. In English, we say, "I miss you." I, the person doing the missing, is the subject, and you, the person being missed, is the object. In French, however, the order is reversed: You say, "Tu me manques." The person being missed is the subject and the person doing the missing the object. Literally translated, the French sentence appears to mean "you miss me." A strong determinist would expect this structural difference to indicate that speakers of French and English have different understandings of missing a person. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is so.

This is not to say that language structure and thought are completely unrelated. For example, Peter Gordon (2004) reported that members of the Piraha, a Brazilian tribe he studied, have difficulty understanding and recalling numbers for which they have no words. Fausey and Boroditsky (2011) found small differences in eyewitness memories for speakers of Spanish and English. Experiments done by Gilbert et al. (2006) suggest that language affects color perception in the right visual field but not the left. This corresponds to the fact that language processing is located primarily on the left side of the brain. Casasanto (2008) conducted studies on the way that Greek and English speakers estimate time. He noted that all languages use space and the accumulation of material as metaphors for time. However, languages use these metaphors unequally. For example, English uses mostly distance metaphors; for example, we talk about a “long time,” whereas Greek uses mostly material metaphors, such as sand flowing through an hourglass. Casasanto showed that, in an experimental situation, Greek and English speakers estimated time differently because of this. However, a brief training session caused these differences to disappear. Casasanto’s work, like that of Gilbert and colleagues, shows the complexity of the relationship between language and perception. But it also shows that this relationship is fairly weak and easily overcome. The linguist John McWhorter (2014) said that, for the most part, the world looks the same in any language.

Beyond the technical difficulties with tests of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, the idea itself seems to miss one of the most compelling aspects of human communication. Although scholars often argue about the subtleties and poetics of translation, all languages are sufficiently similar so that anything said in one language can be translated into every other human language. It is true that sometimes a single word in one language requires many words in another. For example, there is no English equivalent for the Norwegian word “*utepils*” or the Italian word “*culaccino*,” but it’s not at all difficult for an English speaker to understand what these words mean. The first is to enjoy a beer outside (particularly the first one of spring), and the second refers to the mark left on a table by a damp glass (or the dregs left in a glass of wine or the end of a loaf of bread or salami, depending on context). A great deal of study may be required to fully appreciate the meaning of a foreign term (although the same may be true of fully understanding a word in one's own language[8]). However, no one has ever found a meaning in one language that was simply incomprehensible to speakers of other languages.

[8] For an idea of the complexity of understanding a single word, consider what Walt Whitman (1819–1892), one of the United States' key philosophers of democracy, had to say about the word: "We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken'd, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted. It is, in some sort, younger brother of another great and often-used word, Nature, whose history also waits unwritten" (Whitman, 2017, p. 56).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Before returning to our discussion of spoken language, it is important to note that anthropologists also study the nonverbal ways in which humans communicate. Our use of our bodies, interpersonal space, physical objects, and even time can communicate worlds of information. In the words of Edward Hall (1959), an influential analyst of nonverbal behavior, "time talks" and "space speaks." Nonverbal communication includes artifacts, haptics, chronemics, proxemics, and kinesics.

In the context of nonverbal communication, **artifacts** are items such as clothing, jewelry, tattoos, piercings, and other visible body modifications that send messages. For example, among the Tuareg, a people of the Sahara, men often wear veils and use the position of the veil as an important part of nonverbal communication (R. Murphy, 1964). A Tuareg man lowers his veil only among intimates and people of lower social status. He raises it high when he wishes to appear noncommittal. In the United States, we are very aware of the use of artifacts to send messages about ourselves. A pierced ear means something different from a pierced lip or tongue. Some students come to class in torn jeans and T-shirts; others wear designer labels or a white shirt and tie. All are trying to send messages about who they are.

Haptics refers to the study and analysis of touch. Handshakes, pats on the back or head, kisses, and hugs are all ways we communicate by touch. Many American males, for example, believe that the quality of a handshake communicates important information. Strong, firm handshakes are taken to indicate power, self-confidence, and strength of character; limp handshakes may be interpreted as suggesting lack of interest, indecisiveness, or effeminacy. Americans generally feel free to use their left hands for virtually anything, but in many cultures, particularly in the Middle East, the left hand is considered unclean and people scrupulously avoid using it for eating, handling money, and many other social interactions.

Some anthropologists suggest that societies can be divided into “contact” cultures, in which people tend to interact at close distances and touch one another frequently, and “noncontact” cultures, in which people tend to interact at greater distance and avoid touching (Hall, 1966; Montagu, 1978). Contact cultures are common in the Middle East, India, the Mediterranean, and Latin America. Noncontact cultures include those of northern Europe, North America, and Japan. But this dichotomy is too simplistic: India, for example, may be a contact culture between equals but is very much a noncontact culture between people regarded as socially unequal. In the United States, in public social relationships, the person who touches another is likely to have more power than the person who is touched. For example, a boss may touch a subordinate on the shoulder, but the subordinate is unlikely to touch a boss on the shoulder (Leathers, 1997, p. 126).

Chronemics refers to the study of cultural understandings of time. For example, in North American culture, what does it say when a person shows up for an appointment 40 minutes late? Does it mean something different if they show up 10 minutes early? Is a Latin American who shows up late for an appointment saying the same thing?

Edward Hall (1983) divided cultures into those with monochronic time (M-time), such as the United States and northern European countries, and those with polychronic time (P-time). Hall argued that in M-time cultures, time is perceived as inflexible and people organize their lives according to schedules. In P-time cultures, time is understood as fluid; the emphasis is on social interaction, and activities are not expected to proceed like clockwork. Thus, being late for an appointment in P-time cultures does not convey the unspoken messages that it would convey in an M-time culture (Victor, 1992).

Like the contact/noncontact dichotomy, M-time and P-time seem to capture a basic truth about cultural variation but fail to account for the enormous variability within cultures. For example, how long an individual is kept waiting for an appointment may have more to do with power than with cultural perceptions of time. People are more likely to be on time for their superiors but keep their subordinates waiting.

Proxemics is the social use of space (Figure 4.8). Hall (1968) identified three different ranges of personal communicative space. Intimate distance, from 1 to 18 inches, is typical for lovers and very intimate friends. Personal distance, from 18 inches to 4 feet, characterizes relationships among friends, and social distance, from 4 to 12 feet, is common among relative strangers. However, these distances are also affected by circumstances, culture, gender, and aspects of individual personality. We speak to strangers at a much closer distance at a movie theater or in a classroom than we would in an unconfined space. In the United States, women and mixed-gender pairs talk to each other at closer distances than do men. In Turkey, on the other hand, men and women talk at close distances with members of their own sex but at very large distances with members of the opposite sex (Leathers, 1997).

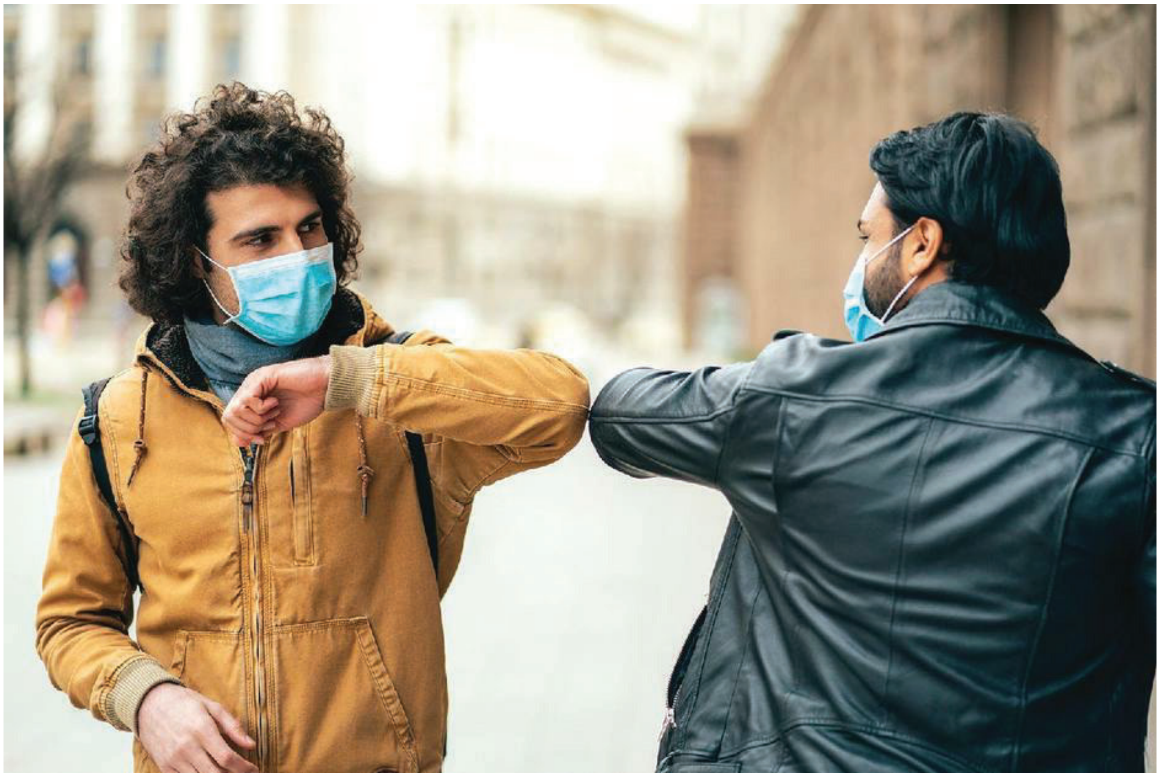

Figure 4.8 In addition to speaking, people use their hands and facial expressions, as well as interpersonal space, to communicate. New styles of greeting developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Finally, **kinesics** is the study of body position, movement, facial expressions, and gaze. We use our posture, our visual expression, eye contact, and other body movements to communicate interest, boredom, and many additional things. Virtually all body movements can have significance. But, of course, not all do. Clifford Geertz (1973) famously suggested that the job of an ethnographer was learning to tell the winks from the twitches—that is, to tell the meaningful communication from the meaningless. Geertz meant this metaphorically, but those who study kinesics do it literally.

The case of smiling is a particularly interesting example of kinesic research. It is likely that smiling and some other facial expressions are biologically based human universals. There are no societies in which people do not smile. Smiling is also found in chimpanzees and gorillas, our nearest nonhuman relations. Moreover, some aspects of smiling seem to transcend cultural variation. In any society, social interactions are more likely to have a positive outcome if people are smiling than if they are frowning or scowling. Smiling and laughter are likely to be involved in creating cooperative relationships (Mehu & Dunbar, 2008).

But smiling also shows the powerful effects of culture on biology. A smile does not mean the same thing in all cultures. Americans often equate smiling with happiness, but people in many cultures smile when they experience surprise, wonder, or embarrassment (Ferraro, 1994). A study of the recognition of facial expressions among Trobrianders in New Guinea showed agreement that a smile was associated with happiness most of the time. However, other expressions showed a marked difference with Western interpretations. Expressions widely associated with fear in Western society are associated with anger and threats in some New Guinea societies (Crivelli et al., 2016). A study by Yuki, et al. (2007) showed that people in Japan and the United States tended to interpret emotion in facial expressions differently: Americans tend to focus on the position of the mouth, whereas Japanese tend to focus on the eyes. A smile that combines the position of the mouth and the eyes is known as a Duchenne smile, after Guillaume Duchenne, the scientist who described it in the mid-19th century. Duchenne smiles have often been considered an indicator of authenticity. But Krumhuber and Manstead (2009) showed that more than 80% of people can fake them.

Despite the differences between American and Japanese focus in smiling, Japanese and Americans agree that smiling faces are more sociable than neutral faces (Matsumoto & Kudoh, 1993), and most often interpret smiles in the same way (Nagashima & Schellenberg, 1997).

As the use of facial recognition software becomes more common, issues about the universality of facial expressions like smiles take on increasing importance (see Chen & Jack, 2017). There are no human expressions that always mean the same thing. Culture and context must always be taken into account, as well as the universal human ability to deceive others. People’s expressions and other aspects of body language communicate but do not do so more clearly than language or other sorts of communication.

Ethnography

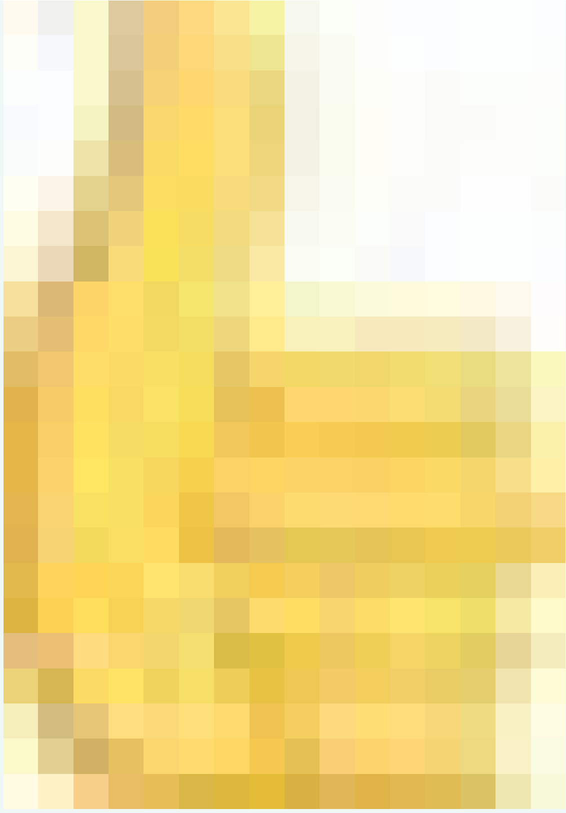
Gestures, Emoticons, and Emojis

Understanding the meaning of a communication is often much more than simply understanding the words that have been said. The connection between language and the body runs deep. When we talk, we often use our entire bodies. Our hands move, our posture changes, and our eyes and our shoulders are all in motion. Numerous studies show that in some contexts, body signals carry between 50% and 70% of the information being communicated (Holler et al., 2018, pp. 1900–1908). In a fascinating test of this idea, Rauscher et al. (1996) showed test subjects Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote cartoons. They found that when people were prevented from gesturing with their hands, they had a much more difficult time using words to describe action sequences.

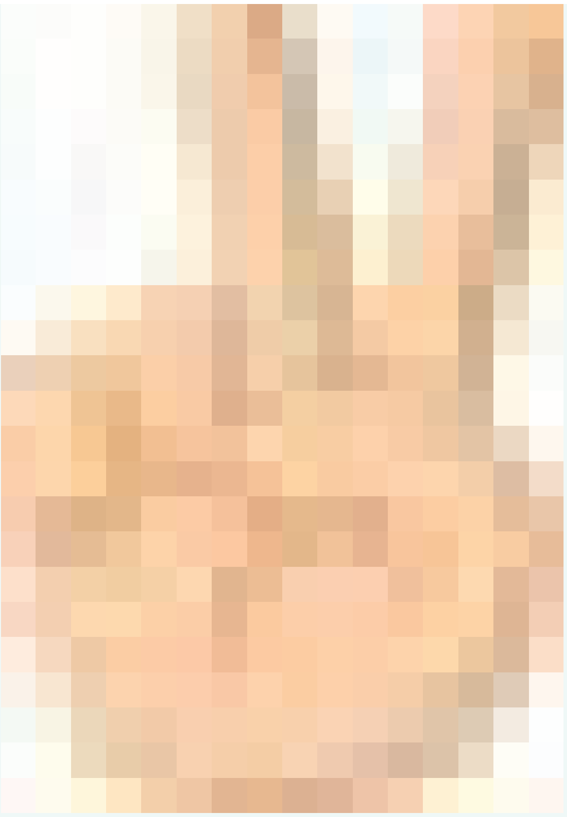
The connection between body movements and meaning has always been a problem for written language. There is no uniform code for expressing irony, ambivalence, anger, or other emotions in writing. Medieval monks tried to get around this problem by illustrating their manuscripts, and teenagers writing postcards in the 1980s filled them with x’s and o’s representing hugs and kisses. However, as linguist Gretchen McCulloch writes in *Because Internet* (2019), the problem is much greater now. The rise of smartphones and the Internet has led to an explosion of written communication. In the past, people may have written letters weekly or more, but in 2018, people around the world were estimated to have sent more than 145 BILLION messages each day! Eighteen- to 24-year-olds in the United States generally send and receive more than 120 text messages a day (Burke, 2018). How are the missing gestures and other body movements added to this enormous body of texting?

There are many answers to the question. Some involve the creative use of capitals or punctuation marks. However, one key way is through the use of emoticons and emojis. When people started to use text messages frequently, they needed a way to indicate whether a text was ironic or serious. Early emoticons filled this role. There were text symbols such as :-) or :-(. At about the same time, kaomoji developed in Japan. Where emoticons show emotion by changing the character used for the mouth, kaomoji often change the character for the eyes. So, happy and sad in kaomoji are ^_^ and (‘_’), respectively. This difference repeats the point made above previously about Japanese focus on the eyes versus Western focus on the mouth. Pictorial emojis first appeared in the late 1990s. They added to rather than replaced emoticons and emojis.

McCulloch notes that cultures have different kinds of gestures to communicate, and there are different kinds of emojis that go along with these. The first class is the “emblem.” These are namable gestures that have specific agreed-upon meanings within a culture. The thumbs-up gesture (



) is a good example of an emblem. In most contexts, it indicates approval and has positive connotations. However, its meaning is dependent on culture and context. In some places, it can be equivalent to giving the middle finger. Most emblems translate directly into emojis. Some of these are



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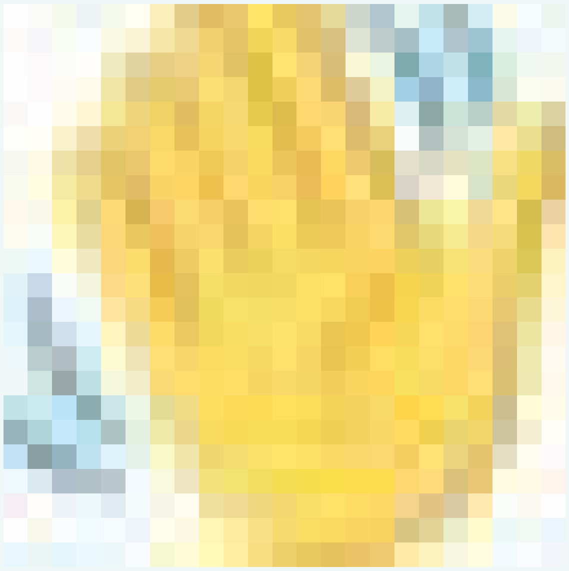

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, and

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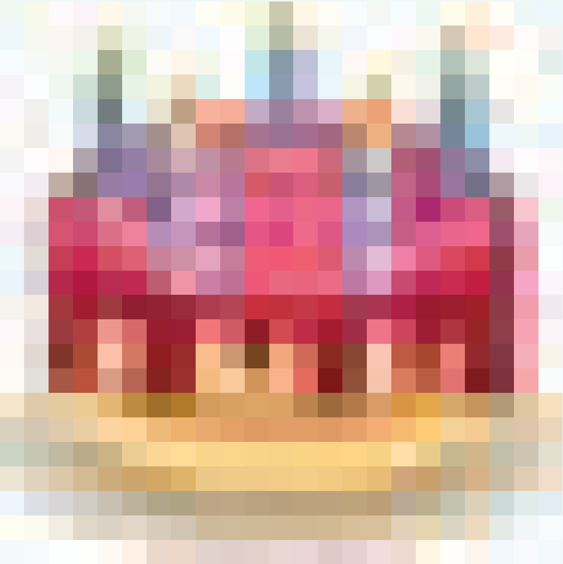
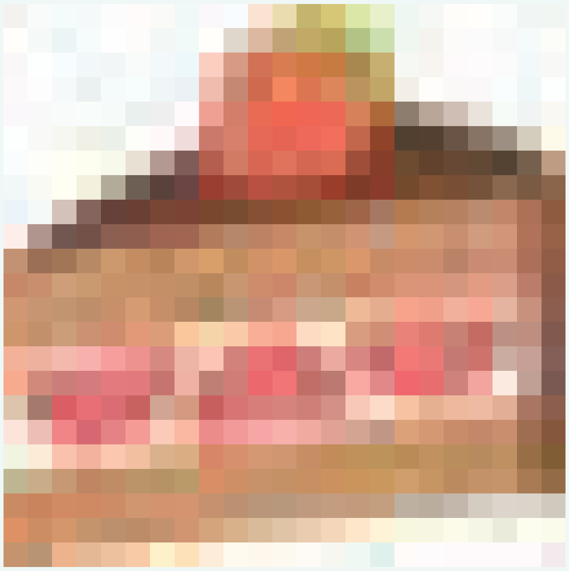
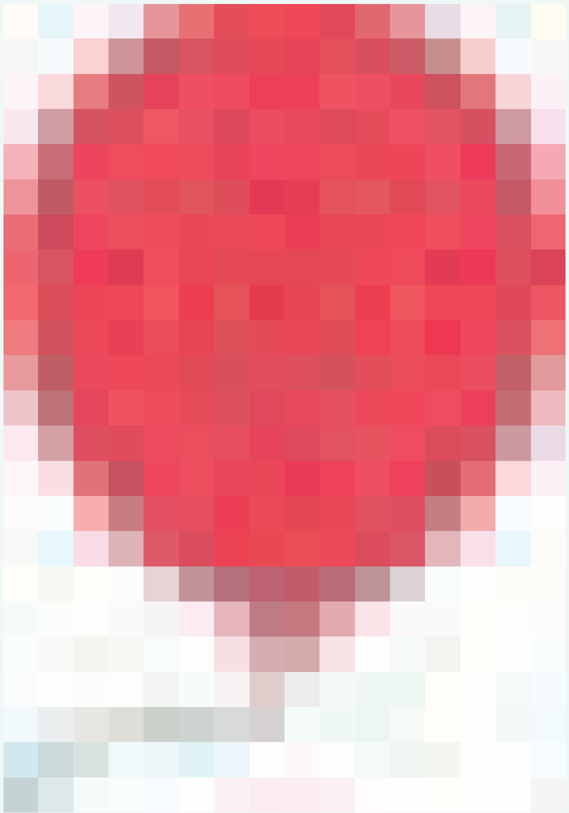
Emblems form only a small part of the body movements we use in language. We use less specific gestures when we give directions, add emphasis, make a point, show size, and so on. Researchers have found that even children who are blind from birth make these kinds of gestures (Iverson & Goldin-Meadow, 1997). Linguists call these gestures “co-speech.” Co-speech is very flexible, and according to McCulloch, many emojis serve a co-speech function. She gives the example of birthday greetings, which may be illustrated with a cake , a slice of cake , a wrapped gift

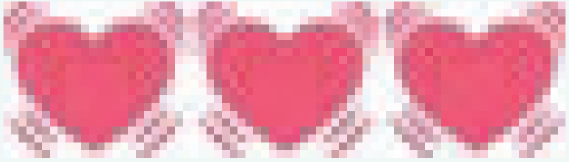
, a balloon



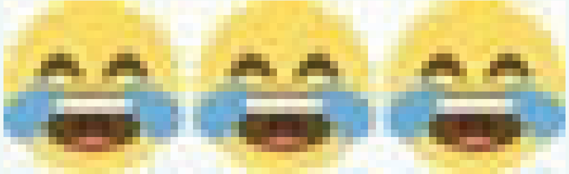
, a bottle with a popping cork

, and several others.

Finally, McCulloch notes that most of us don’t gesture a single time. For example, when we use an emblem, it’s usually not a single rapid motion. Instead, we either move our hand repeatedly or hold it for a sustained moment. Repetitive gestures are known as beats. McCulloch found that when two, three, or four emojis were found in a sequence, they were most often simple repetitions such as

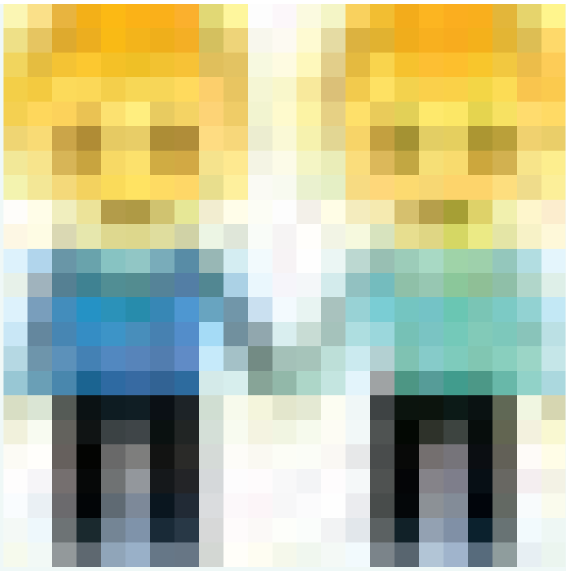


or

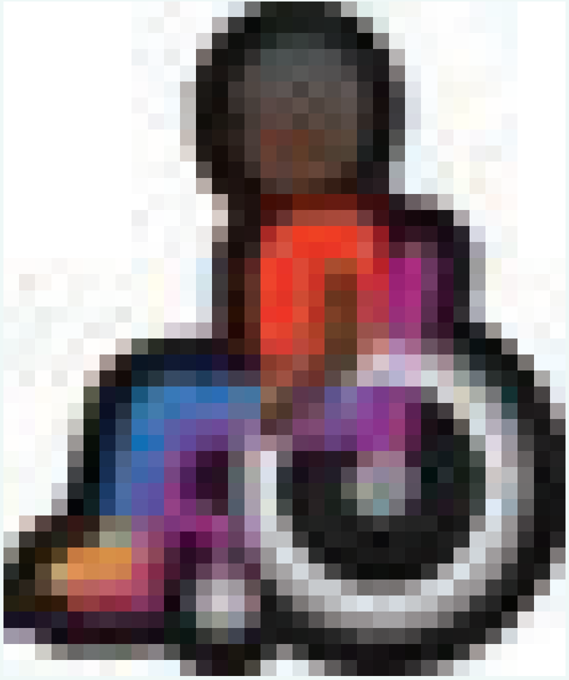


. She compares these to the beat gestures that people commonly make as they talk.

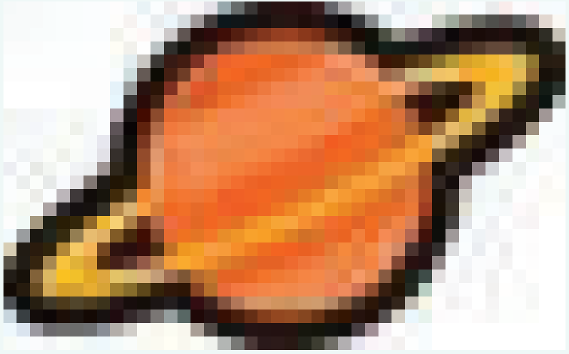
Emojis are a way of making text-based communication more like the experience of actual speech. The number of official emojis is always expanding. There are currently more than 3,000. In 2019, 230 new ones were introduced, including people holding hands



, a person in a wheelchair

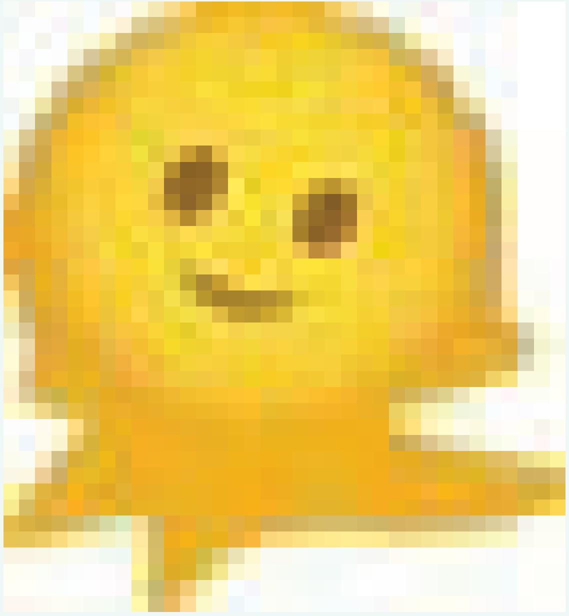


, a ringed planet



, and a banjo

. A total of 117 were introduced in 2000 and an additional 37 in 2021. Some of the newest emojis are melting face



and low battery

. Additionally, new skin tones have been added for some, as well as gestures. Official emojis are controlled by the Unicode Consortium. Anyone can submit a proposal for a new emoji. Some of the criteria for selection are that it will work at a small size, that it adds to what can be said, and that many people will use it.

Questions

1. What new emojis would you like to see created?
2. How often do you use emojis? Why do you choose to communicate in emojis or add them to texts rather than using more conventional language?
3. McCulloch compares repeated emojis to gestural beats. If you send or receive repeated emojis, what do you think when you send or receive them?
4. How important is it to you to send emojis that match your skin tone? Why?

LANGUAGE CHANGE

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum

Si þin nama gehalgod

to becume þin rice

gewurþe ðin willa

on eorðan swa swa on heofonum.

urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg

and forgyf us ure gyltas

swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum

and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge

ac alys us of yfele soþlice

This 11th-century version of the Lord's Prayer[9] shows how much English has changed in the past thousand years. All language is constantly changing on many levels, including sound, structure, and vocabulary, and some of the change happens in patterned ways.

[9] In modern-day English, the Lord's Prayer is "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, amen." You can hear how the 11th-century version, printed here, probably sounded at http://bit.ly/1T8E82U. The nonstandard symbols are from the International Phonetic Alphabet. You can find additional information on the International Phonetic Alphabet at https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/.

Consider sound. When we imagine people speaking English hundreds of years ago, we often think of them using different words than we do but otherwise sounding pretty much like us. But this is incorrect. English spoken in the 14th century sounded very different from the English of today. If an average English speaker of today were able to time travel to an English-speaking place in the 1300s, they would understand very little and no one would be able to understand them. Between 1400 and 1600, there was a change in the sound of English that is called the Great Vowel Shift (Table 4.2). A correct reading aloud of the Lord's Prayer at the start of this section would require speaking with the sounds used in English more than 600 years ago. For example, the fifth word of the last line, "yfele," gives us the modern English word "evil." The medieval pronunciation is close to "oo-vah-la." When Americans think of the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare, they often imagine them being performed with the modern accent of southern England; this accent is sometimes called received pronunciation. However, the sounds of English have changed so much since Shakespeare's time that two thirds of his sonnets no longer rhyme (National Public Radio, 2012). For example, the last two lines of sonnet 116 are

If this be error and upon me prov'd,

I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

In the sonnet form, the last lines always rhyme. So, for Shakespeare, "proved" rhymed with "loved." They no longer do.

Table 4.2 Great Vowel Shift

Middle English Vowel Sound	Becomes Modern English Vowel Sound	Middle English Word	Was Pronounced to Rhyme With Modern Word	Becomes Modern Word
/i:/	/aI/	Mis	Piece	Mice

/uː/	/aʊ/	Mus	Moose	Mouse
/eː/	/iː/	Ges	Place	Geese
/oː/	/uː/	Gos	Close	Goose
/ɛː/	/iː/	Met	Met	Meat
/ɔː/	/oʊ/	brɔk	Squawk	Broke
/aː/	/eI/	Name	Comma	name

Shifting sounds are not just something out of the past. Language sounds are constantly changing. For example, since about 1950, some vowel sounds in U.S. cities around the Great Lakes have been changing, a process linguists call the northern city shift (Labov et al., 2005). For example, if you pronounce the word “cot” more or less the same way you pronounce the word “cat,” you probably grew up in the Great Lakes region of the United States.

The grammatical structures of a language (its syntax) also change. For example, as we have seen, meaning in modern English is tightly tied to word order. But in Old English, as in Latin, the endings of nouns indicate whether they were subjects or objects, making word order within sentences less important. Thus, in Old English, the two sentences “The dog bit the child” and “The dog the child bit” would have the same meaning and be equally grammatical.

Vocabulary is the most noticeable aspect of language change, and this is easily seen in slang. Consider slang terms from the 1950s and 1960s such as “boss” to mean great (as in “The new Little Richard album is really boss”) or “bag” to mean something that an individual likes (as in “What’s your bag?” or “Reading anthropology is really my bag”). Many of us still understand the slang expressions of the 1960s, but terms from the 19th and early 20th centuries are almost entirely lost: Do you know what a hobbledehoy or a man of four outs is?[10]

[10] A hobbledehoy is an awkward adolescent. A man of four outs is a vulgar person without wit, money, credit, or manners.

New words are constantly added to language. In the past 40 years, an entire vocabulary has grown up around computers and the Internet. Words such as software, dot-com, gigabyte, and e-mail would have been unintelligible to most people in 1980. Wi-Fi, spyware, domain name, text message, and many others would have been meaningless to people in the mid-1990s. Before 2006, no one would have known what a “tweet” was (other than a sound a bird makes). In the past few years, gaming, instant messaging, and cell phones have spawned a new vocabulary of acronyms and abbreviations, such as LMAO, LOL, noob, and TTYL.

The use of “they” as a singular, found in this book and in many other places, is an interesting example of linguistic change. English has no agreed-upon pronoun to refer to someone of unknown gender or someone who is neither male nor female. For centuries, people have debated how to handle the confusions that arise because of this. Linguist Dennis Baron notes that more than 200 new words have been invented to fill this absence, and many date to the 19th century. Some of the words proposed (and the year in which they were proposed) are ne (1850), thon (1884), hiser (1884), heesh (1927), and ze (1972) (Baron, 1981, 2020). In fact, there is no need for the invention of a new word. “They” entered English from a Scandinavian source around the year 1200 (etymonline.com). Texts from the 14th and 15th centuries clearly show that “they” could be used as either a singular or a plural. Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the King James Bible all have instances of singular “they.”

So, how do we get the idea that “they” must be plural? It began in the middle of the 16th century, when William Lily proposed a “doctrine of worthiness.” Lily argued that the masculine was more worthy than the feminine, and both were more worthy than the neuter. When scholars began writing grammars of English in the 18th and 19th centuries, they included Lily’s ideas, and so the notion that “he” is superior and includes “she” was taught to generations of schoolchildren (Baron, 2018). In recent years, major publications, such as *The Economist* and *The New York Times*, and style guides, including the Modern Language Association, the Associated Press Stylebook, and the Chicago Manual of Style, have moved away from the use of “he” to include “she” or “his” to include “hers” and toward the use of “they” and “their.” The return of the singular “they” seems almost inevitable.

We can get an indication of just how much American English has changed over the past several decades by looking at dictionary publications. The *American Heritage Dictionary* has a “usage panel” that attempts to determine the proper usage of English words. In discussions for the 1992 third edition of the dictionary, the panel overwhelmingly declared that both “prioritize” and “finalize,” as in “We must prioritize finalizing our plans,” were unacceptable, and 81% of the panel said that “curate,” as in “she curated the museum exhibit,” was improper English. “Curate” was to be used only as a noun. So, you could be the curator of a museum exhibit but could not curate it (Ottenhoff, 1996, p. 279). And this reminds us that change is built into the nature of language.

Language and Culture Contact

The meeting of cultures through travel, trade, war, and conquest is a fundamental force in linguistic change. Languages thus reflect the histories of their speakers. Current-day English contains words derived from French such as “reason,” “joy,” “mutton,” and “liberty” that came into the language after the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century. Other words speak of more recent political events. For example, “cot,” “pajamas,” and “jungle” come from Hindi and reflect the British colonization of India. “Gumbo,” “funky,” and “zebra” come from Kongo and reflect the slave trade. Nahuatl, a language spoken in Mexico and Central America, gave us “tomato,” “coyote,” “shack,” and “avocado.”

When societies where different languages are spoken meet, they often develop a new language that combines features of each of the original ones. Such a language is called a **pidgin**. No one speaks a pidgin as a first language, and the vocabulary of a pidgin is often limited to the words appropriate to the sorts of interactions, usually commercial or political and military, engaged in by the people speaking it (Figure 4.9).

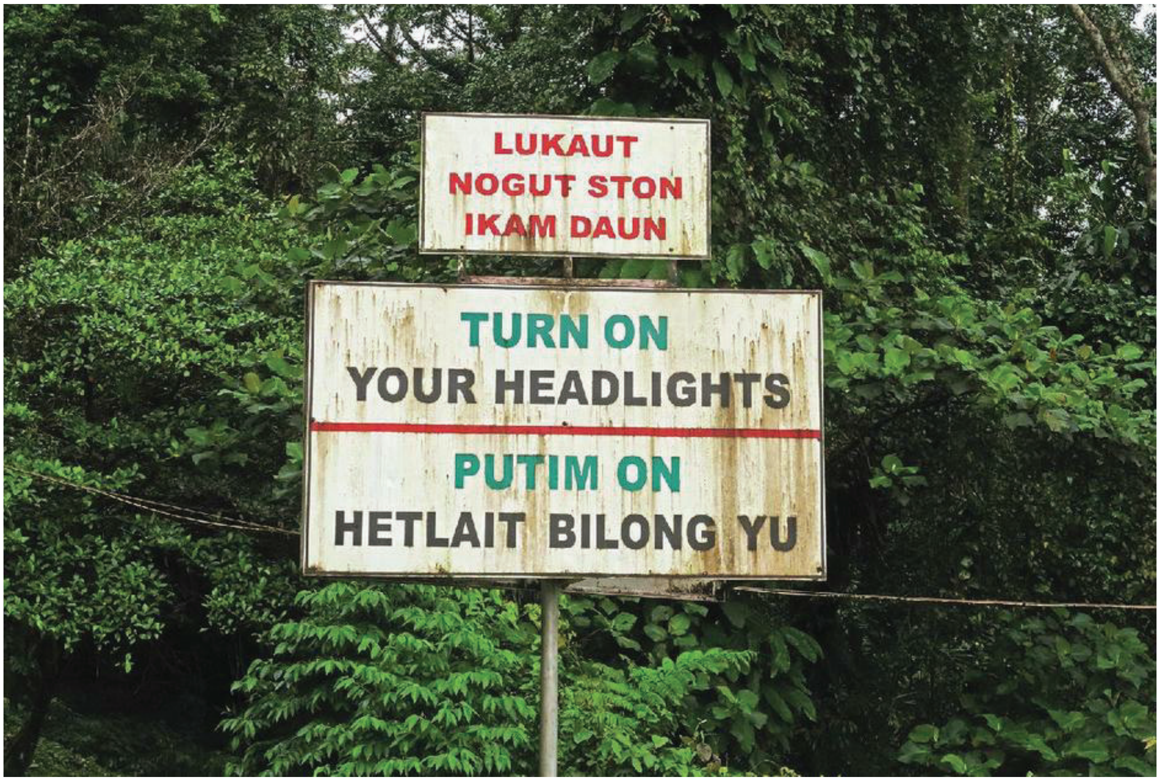


Figure 4.9 Pidgins develop when people who speak different languages come together. As contact deepens, they may become creoles. Here a road sign in Papua New Guinea is written in both English and Tok Pisin, a Papua New Guinea language that began as a pidgin but has become a creole. The top of the sign reads: Lookout, dangerous rocks ahead, slow down.

iStockphoto.com/neil bowman

As culture contact deepens and time passes, pidgins are sometimes lost and people speak only the language of the dominant power. Or, pidgin languages may become creoles. A **creole** is a language composed of elements of two or more different languages. But, unlike a pidgin, people do speak creoles as their first language, and the vocabulary of a creole is as complex and rich as any other.

Many creoles were formed as Europeans expanded into Asia and the

Americas. Often, in countries that were colonized, upper classes speak the language of the colonizing power, and the lower classes speak creoles. In Haiti, for example, from 70% to 90% of the population speaks only creole, but almost all governmental and administrative functions are performed in French, the language of the elite.

Tracing Relationships Among Languages

Comparative linguistics is a field of study that traces the relationships of different languages by searching for similarities among them. When such similarities are numerous, regular, and basic, it is likely that the languages are derived from the same ancestral language.

Linguists have identified a **core vocabulary** of 100 or 200 words, including terms such as “I,” “you,” “man,” “woman,” “blood,” “skin,” “red”, and “green,” that designate things, actions, and activities likely to be named in all the world’s languages. Many believe that core vocabularies change at a predictable rate (about 14% per 1,000 years). **Glottochronology** is a statistical technique that uses this idea to estimate the date of separation of related languages. For example, if linguists examined the core vocabularies of two related languages and found they were 28% different, they would propose that the languages separated from each other 1,000 years ago (because both languages are changing, the total percentage change must be divided in half). Using glottochronology, linguists can discover the historic relationships among languages and use that knowledge to group languages into families. However, the accuracy of the technique has long been controversial, and many modifications have been employed to improve it (Renfrew et al., 2000).

Considering the history of language raises two interesting questions: First, was there at any point a single, original human language? And, second, in the future, will there be a world with one language? Neither of these questions is fully answerable, but we can speculate about each of them.

We do not know if there was a single original human language. The agreed-upon techniques of comparative linguistics can tell us a great deal about the history of languages in the past several thousand years. There are, however, no accepted techniques for establishing the patterns and content of language that reach back tens of thousands of years. Some anthropologists, biologists, and linguists looking at this question claim they can describe the original human language (Ruhlen, 1994; Shevoroshkin & Woodford, 1991. For example, Alec Knight and his colleagues (2003), using techniques from both comparative linguistics and biology, argued that there was an original language, and it had many of the characteristics associated with modern-day African "click" languages. Gell-Mann and Ruhlen (2011) have argued that although most modern languages use a subject–verb–object word order, the original human language must have had a subject–object–verb word order. Such claims are extremely controversial and, for the moment, not widely accepted. However, the development of language almost certainly involved specific genetic changes. Such changes probably happened in a single small group. If this is the case, an original language probably did exist.

The question of whether a single world language is emerging is provocative. We are certainly moving toward linguistic homogenization. The total number of languages in the world has declined. About 10,000 years ago, there may have been as many as 15,000 different languages. Today, there are a bit more than 7,000 languages. About 40% of these are considered endangered. About 95% of the world's languages are spoken by only 3% of the world's total population (Noack & Gamio, 2015). About a quarter of the world's languages are each spoken by fewer than 1,000 people (Anderson, 2010). At the same time, more than half of the world's population speaks one of the 20 most common languages listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Languages by Estimated Number of Speakers

Number	Language	Number of Speakers in Millions
1	English	1,348

2	Mandarin Chinese	1,120
3	Hindi	600
4	Spanish	543
5	Standard Arabic	274
6	Bengali	268
7	French	267
8	Russian	258
9	Portuguese	258
10	Urdu	230
11	Indonesian	199
12	Standard German	134
13	Japanese	126
14	Marathi	99
15	Telugu	96
16	Turkish	88
17	Tamil	85
18	Yue Chinese	85
19	Wu Chinese	82
20	Korean	82

Source: Ethnologue, 2021, https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/ethnologue200

Languages may disappear for various reasons. All their speakers may be killed by disease or genocide. Government policies may deliberately seek to eliminate certain languages. For example, in 1885, the American government explicitly forbade the use of Indian languages in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Children were beaten and otherwise punished for speaking their tribal languages (Coleman, 1999).

Nation-states often try to suppress linguistic diversity within their borders, insisting that government, the court system, and other aspects of public life be conducted in the language of the most numerous and politically powerful groups. China is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. It includes 55 minority ethnic groups, each with its own language. But there is also enormous linguistic diversity among the majority Han Chinese, who speak about 1,500 different “dialects.” The differences among these “dialects” is as great as the differences among European languages. For example, the Wu dialect, spoken in Shanghai, is about as similar to Mandarin as French is to English. Cantonese and Mandarin are about as similar as English and Dutch. In 2004, only about 53% of Chinese could communicate in Mandarin (Economist, 2013; French, 2005). However, the Chinese government has strongly promoted Mandarin. In 2000, the Chinese government adopted a law specifically encouraging the use of Mandarin (China, 2016). In many places, not only is all school instruction in Mandarin, but students are prohibited from speaking any other language while on school property. And, in 2021, the government announced that Mandarin teaching would be compulsory in preschools (Tibetan Review, 2021). In 2020, the government claimed that over 80% of the population could speak Mandarin (Zhao & Wu, 2020).

Global trade favors people who speak the languages of the wealthiest and most populous nations. Similarly, the vast majority of television and radio broadcasts, as well as sites on the Internet, are in a very few languages. In the face of such obstacles, people who are members of linguistic minorities often abandon their languages because they find it more convenient, prestigious, or profitable to speak the languages of wealth and power.

In some senses, linguistic homogenization is a positive development. Today, more people can speak to each other than ever before. In the future, this may be true to an even greater extent. However, the global movement toward fewer languages is also troubling. There is a strong connection between language and ethnic identity. Language is often rooted in culture and entwined with it. As language is lost, so are important elements of cultural identity. Additionally, the disappearance of languages reduces our ability to understand the underlying structures of language and the range of variability these enable.

Not all global forces lead toward language homogenization. First, there is no language spoken by the majority of the world's people. Even with the wide diversity of language in China, Mandarin Chinese is by far the most commonly spoken language, while hundreds of millions of people speak English, Spanish, Russian, French, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic, Portuguese, and several others. None of these languages seem likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Second, although the number of languages spoken in the world has diminished, the diversity within each language has increased. People in New York City; Kingston, Jamaica; Glasgow, Scotland; and Mumbai, India, may all speak English, but that does not necessarily mean they can understand one another. In many cases, the differences between their Englishes are so great a translator is needed. Perhaps more important, the nature of language—the human ability to create new meanings, new words, and new grammatical structures—means that language adapts to the needs, interests, and environments of its speakers. Thus, even as globalizing forces move humans toward cultural and linguistic homogeneity, spaces are created in which linguistic and cultural diversity can also flourish.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND ASSIMILATION

Question: Do you need to speak English to be a true American?

For many, perhaps most people, the language or languages they speak are an important part of their identity. And language can be an important part of national identity as well. The pioneering anthropological linguist Edward Sapir (1956, p. 16) considered the relationship between language and identity. He wrote that language is probably the greatest force of socialization and pointed out that groups of all kinds are held together by shared language. Sapir imagined a family where a young child could not pronounce the name of an older family member. Instead of saying “Gregory,” the child says “Doody.” Soon, all the members of the family call Gregory “Doody.” This both marks and creates family solidarity. The use of “Doody” marks a boundary between family members, intimate friends, and others. Woe betide the outsider who presumes to call Gregory “Doody.” Using that name is a privilege and indicates a profound intimacy.

National identity has also frequently been tied to language. This linkage is so common that it often seems logical and inevitable. For example, we think of the French as those who speak French and the Italians as those who speak Italian. However, in both cases, the creation of linguistic identity involved the suppression of other languages (in the case of France, these include Breton, Alsatian, and Occitan; in the case of Italy, Ladin, Friulian, Sardinian, and many others). And, in both cases, minority linguistic communities continue to exist.

There are also many nations where linguistic and national identities are separate. For example, Switzerland has four official languages: French, German, Italian, and Romansh. India, the world’s largest democracy, designates Hindi and English as the languages used to conduct national government business. However, less than half of the population speaks either language. Indian states can recognize their own languages, and there are currently 22 officially designated languages.

English has long been seen as fundamental to American identity. A recent study from the Pew Research Center shows that more than 70% of people in the United States think that speaking English is very important for being truly American. Only 32% thought that it was necessary to be born in America and only 40% that it was necessary to share American customs and traditions to be truly American. Strong majorities viewed language as critical to national identity across European countries as well (Stokes, 2017).

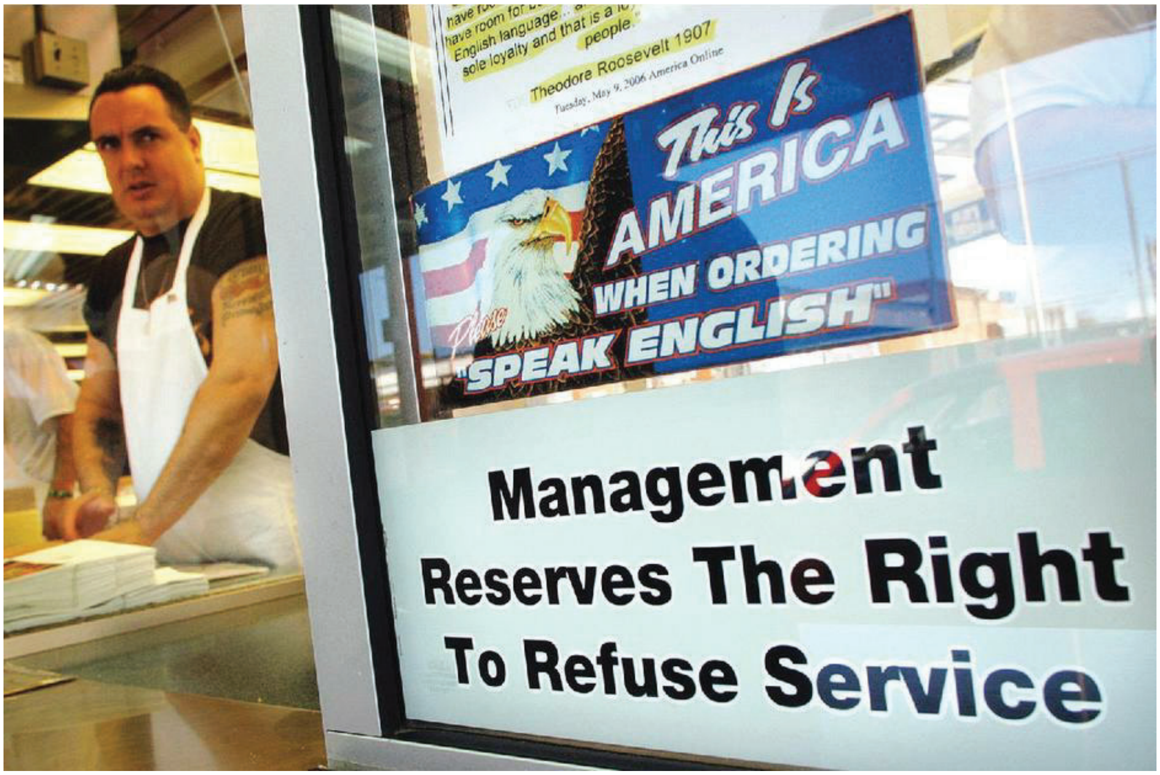

have room for
English language...
sole loyalty and that is a
people.
Theodore Roosevelt 1907
Tuesday, May 9, 2006 America Online
This Is
AMERICA
WHEN ORDERING
Please
"SPEAK ENGLISH"
Management
Reserves The Right
To Refuse Service

Figure 4.10 Between 2006 and 2016, Gino’s, a popular cheesesteak spot in Philadelphia, garnered both fame and controversy with a sign asking customers to speak English.

William Thomas Cain/Getty Images

In the United States, the tools of government and education have often been used to impose linguistic uniformity. For example, as briefly mentioned above, from 1887 well into the second half of the 20th century, the U.S. government operated schools for Native Americans where students were forbidden from speaking their native languages. The government did not officially repudiate this policy until the Native American Languages Act of 1990.

Although policies officially banning the use of languages other than English no longer exist, schools often adopt practices and policies that make languages other than English invisible. They “create the impression in the minds of … children that their first language is backward, useless, of low status. [This] negative impression is indelibly carved into their identities” (Salome, 2010, p. 75).

The demands of society create conflict for people whose first language is not English. Many aspects of the identity of these individuals are tied to their first language. The deep emotionality of people’s first language is evidenced by the fact that bilingual people tend to pray and swear in their first language (Dewaele, 2004; Salome, 2010, p. 72). However, it is almost impossible to be socially and financially successful in broader society without speaking the majority language. Additionally, nonnative speakers continually receive the message that their first language marks them as inferior.

The result is enormous pressure for linguistic conformity. Linguists often speak of a three-generation rule—the tendency for immigrants to lose their native language within three generations. Members of the immigrant generation usually speak the new language with some difficulty. Their children understand and sometimes speak their parents’ language, but they are most comfortable in the language of the nation they live in. Their children (the grandchildren of the immigrants) speak only the language of the nation where they were born. There are certainly many exceptions to this rule. For example, isolated communities like the Amish or Hutterites may still speak German even after hundreds of years of living in the United States. On the other hand, even when maintaining a language is a specific goal for a family, that language may disappear (Field, 2011, p. 179).

Key Questions

1. Do you speak a language other than English as a first language? If so, do you want your children and grandchildren to speak that language?
2. If English is your first language, did your parents or grandparents speak a different first language? How do you feel about your ability (or lack of ability) in that language?
3. Bilingualism broadens our connections with the world and has many other benefits, including improved brain functioning and

heightened sensitivity to the environment (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Should schools focus on ensuring that children are fluent in at least two languages rather than focusing only on English?

SUMMARY

1. In what ways is human language distinct from animal communication? All animals communicate. However, human communication differs from that of other animals in its flexibility and its ability to convey new ideas and abstract concepts. Some key elements believed to be unique to human language are recursion, productivity, and displacement.
2. Can animals be taught to use speech like humans do? There have been many attempts to teach animals, particularly primates, to speak. Their results are controversial. Some animals may be trained to use language in humanlike ways. However, language is a fundamental part of human adaptation. As far as we know, it does not play this role for any other species.
3. When did human language originate? Anthropologists disagree about the origins of language. Human ancestors certainly communicated with one another. However, the linguistic abilities of current-day *Homo sapiens* may have emerged between 200,000 and 50,000 years ago.
4. How do children learn language? In all cultures, children go through the same stages of language learning in the same sequence and at roughly the same speed regardless of the language being learned. This suggests that humans have an innate language-learning capacity. However, this potential for speech is realized only through social interaction with other humans. Children deprived of such interaction do not learn language.
5. What are the principal components of all human language? The components of a language are a sound system (phonology), rules that pattern word formation (morphology), and a system for combining words into meaningful utterances (syntax).
6. What is the relationship between the rules of language and the

performance of language? Language can be described by a series of rules, but speaking and understanding language requires deep understanding of culture. Critical elements of meaning are enacted through performance. The performance of language deviates from its formal rules.

7. Are some forms of speech better than other forms? Stratified societies often have many different forms of language. When this is the case, some forms are often considered correct and others improper or inferior. Although society may stigmatize some forms of speech, there is no scientific sense in which one grammatical pattern or accent is better or worse than another.
8. Define and describe African American Vernacular English (AAVE). AAVE is the speech pattern common to rural and urban working-class African American communities. Historically highly stigmatized, AAVE uses grammatical rules that are different from but no less logical than Standard Spoken American English. Much of American literature, poetry, and music has been strongly influenced by AAVE.
9. What is the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis? The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis is the notion that grammar and vocabulary influence perception of the environment and therefore speakers of different languages perceive their worlds in different ways. Although some evidence supports the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, most linguists argue that the similarities among languages far outweigh their differences and that language does not have a systematic effect on thought or perception.
10. What forms of nonverbal communication are used in human societies? Humans everywhere communicate nonverbally as well as verbally. In every society, people use gestures, facial expressions, posture, and time to communicate with one another. However, the meaning of a gesture or expression may vary greatly from culture to culture.
11. Describe two key ways in which language changes. Both the sound and vocabulary of languages change over time. For example, many sounds of medieval English do not exist in current-day English. New words enter a vocabulary through innovation as well as contact between cultures. Vocabularies

reflect histories, which frequently include conquest and submission.

12. Was there ever a single human language? Linguists have developed techniques to trace the histories of languages and the relationships among them. However, these techniques cannot determine if there was ever a single human language. The development of language involved genetic changes, and these are likely to happen in a single small group. Hence, there probably was a single original language.
13. Are we moving toward a world with only a single language? Linguistic diversity has decreased dramatically, and many languages face the threat of extinction. However, many languages have millions of speakers and are unlikely to disappear. As languages expand to include more speakers, the diversity within them may increase. People who speak the same language may not understand one another.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. In what ways is the learning and use of language by humans different from the use of call systems by other animals?
2. Language use is closely related to culture. What aspects of your use of language reflect your particular ethnic and geographical background?
3. How closely related do you believe language and thought to be? During the production of Chapter 3 in this book, the authors and editors debated whether we should use the word “autistics” or the phrase “people with autism.” Do you think which one is used makes a difference?
4. Describe American styles of nonverbal communication. Are there different styles of nonverbal communication in different areas of the United States?
5. In the 1890s, L. L. Zamenhof believed that different language was a key source of strife between people. He

created Esperanto, which he hoped would be a universal language, to foster peace and harmony. Today, linguistic diversity is rapidly disappearing. Is this a good or bad thing?

Key Terms

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (p. 101)

allophones (p. 93)

artifacts (p. 105)

bound morpheme (p. 94)

call system (p. 88)

chronemics (p. 105)

code-switching (p. 102)

communication (p. 88)

comparative linguistics (p. 111)

conventionality (p. 88)

core (p. 111)

creole (p. 110)

descriptive or structural linguistics (p. 92)

dialect (p. 100)

displacement (p. 89)

free morpheme (p. 94)

gender (p. 96)

glottochronology (p. 111)

haptics (p. 105)

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) (p. 92)

kinesics (p. 106)

lexicon (p. 92)

morphemes (p. 94)

morphology (p. 92)

phones (p. 92)

phoneme (p. 93)

phonology (p. 92)

pidgin (p. 110)

productivity (p. 89)

proxemics (p. 105)

Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (p. 103)

semiotics (p. 96)

sign (p. 96)

sociolinguistics (p. 98)

speech community (p. 90)

Standard Spoken American English (SSAE) (p. 92)

syntax (p. 92)

universal grammar (p. 91)

Word (p. 94)

PART II EQUALITIES AND INEQUALITIES

5 MAKING A LIVING

People use many different strategies to make their livelihoods. Subsistence patterns develop in response to seasonal variation, long-term environmental and demographic patterns, and the presence of other groups. Here, an Inuit hunter on Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada, assesses the seascape.

All Canada Photos/Alamy Stock Photo

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the overall patterns of production strategies and

their relationship to the environment.
2. Summarize the major characteristics of foraging.
3. Explain what pastoralism is, and give an example.
4. Describe how horticulture works.
5. Analyze the key differences between horticulture and agriculture.
6. Discuss the characteristics of industrialism with examples.
7. Explain the relationship between climate change and food choice.

All societies survive by using their environments to provide people with the basic material requirements of life: food, clothing, and shelter. In this chapter, we focus on the different **subsistence strategies**, or ways in which societies transform the material resources of the environment into food.

Anthropologists have always been interested in the interactions between human cultures and their environments. We seek to understand both how the physical environment affects patterns of culture and how culture, in turn, changes the environment. Although we are used to thinking about the physical environment as natural, it is important to keep in mind that it is also a cultural construction. The ways that people use their environment affects their understanding of it. But the ways that people understand their environment also has implications for the ways they use it. Writing about Australian Aboriginal people, Ambelin Kwaymullina, an indigenous lawyer from the Bailgu and Njamal people of Western Australia, wrote that “country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human—all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self” (2005). This worldview might be informed by the long history of Aboriginal people living by foraging the land. However, it also informs how Aboriginal people might use their land when they are not foraging.

HUMAN ADAPTATION: THE ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Unlike most other animals, humans live in an extremely broad range of environments. Some, such as the Arctic or the Great Victoria Desert of Australia, present extreme challenges to human existence and are relatively limited in the numbers of people they can support. Others, such as temperate forestland or plains, can support large populations.

The productivity of any environment is related to the type of technology used to exploit it. For example, the Arctic can sustain only a relatively small population with traditional Inuit technology. With modern technology and transportation, however, the circumpolar Arctic currently supports more than 13 million people, engaged in indigenous hunting and herding strategies as well as modern industrial pursuits (Arctic Center, 2019).

All societies must utilize the physical environment to provide their people with the basic material requirements of life: food, clothing, and shelter. Different societies have different subsistence strategies, or ways of transforming the material resources of the environment into food. These various subsistence strategies are, in turn, related to differences in economic systems and forms of social organization. However, as environments change, so must subsistence strategies and, therefore, other aspects of culture as well.

For most of the history of our species, humans and our ancestors were nomadic, living by fishing, hunting, and collecting vegetable foods. As populations increased, foragers spread out into many environments, creating new tools and developing diverse cultures. By 16,000 to 12,500 years ago, humans had spread to every continent except Antarctica (see Stanyon et al., 2009). However, foraging sets significant limits on population growth and density and, consequently, on the complexity of social organization.

About 11,000 to 10,000 years ago, human groups in Africa, Asia, and Europe began to domesticate plants and animals, a change that occurred about 1,000 years later in the Americas (Bryant, 2003; Temple University, 2009). Called the “Agricultural Revolution” or sometimes the “Neolithic Revolution,” the transition to food production was, in fact, a gradual process that happened over centuries. However, it was revolutionary in the possibilities it opened. Plant and animal domestication led to increased populations, and sedentary village life became widespread. Over time, means of applying more technology to farming and animal management were developed. This led not only to increased productivity but also to greater control of human labor and, eventually, to complex social forms such as the state.

The question of why plant and animal domestication happened in some places and not others has several possible answers. First, many environments make cultivation difficult or impossible. The climate in the Arctic or some deserts may preclude agriculture. Alternatively, some climates, such as the fertile valleys of California, are so productive that there was little pressure for people to make the transition to food production.

Second, foraging is often far less work than cultivation. Farming requires field preparation, weeding and tending, harvesting, and storage of the harvest. Foraging does not. Farming also requires a long-term commitment to living in a single location, and this may not always be possible or desirable. Lack of year-round water or political conditions such as raiding and warfare may make permanent residence impossible.

Third, sometimes foraging strategies were more dependable than cultivation or animal husbandry. For example, with the introduction of the horse by the Spaniards in the 16th century, some Native American Plains cultures, such as the Cheyenne, did so well with bison hunting that they gave up farming and returned to foraging (Hämäläinen, 2003). Even today, many foraging and pastoral populations resist abandoning these occupations for cultivation because they prefer the economic, social, and psychological satisfaction of a foraging or pastoral way of life. In these societies, hunting and pastoralism are highly valued occupations, intimately connected to a people's cultural identity. Many Americans today forage; they hunt, fish, and gather wild foods (Figure 5.1). These activities are simultaneously recreational pastimes and markers of identity, and they make important contributions to the family diet.

Figure 5.1 Hunting, a form of foraging, is a recreational pastime and a marker of identity. It makes an important contribution to many family diets in the United States.

iStockphoto.com/nesneJkraM

Although the broad historical trend has been toward people remaking the environment and increasing human population, specific environmental and historical conditions explain the exact sequence of events in any particular place.

Preindustrial farming technologies led to steady population increases. Large-states civilizations such as Rome, China, the Inca, and Japan were based on these technologies. However, in all preindustrial farming societies, more than 80% of the population was directly involved in food production. This limited the total population possible. The world’s population reached 1 billion in the early 19th century. At this time, the largest cities in the world were London in England and Beijing in China. Each had a population of slightly over 1 million, about the current-day size of San Jose, California; Glasgow, Scotland; or Sendai, Japan.

The Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was another dramatic change in human subsistence strategies. The Industrial Revolution involved the replacement of human and animal energy by machines. It was truly revolutionary, both in the speed with which it developed and in its effects on society.

Industrialism greatly increased human productivity. In industrial societies, the percentage of the population directly involved in food production declines dramatically while the total population soars. In 2021, the world’s population was around 7.75 billion. The Tokyo metropolitan area, currently the world’s largest city, has a population of over 37 million. Delhi in India and Shanghai in China both have populations of between 25 and 30 million (https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities). In addition, industrialism has produced a relatively high standard of living for enormous numbers of people.

However, the price of industrialism has been high. Industrial societies have elevated levels of inequality. On the one hand, even relatively poor people today have access to goods and technologies unimaginable to the wealthiest people of earlier eras. On the other hand, the economic distance between the wealthy and the poor is greater than ever. Also, industry itself is a major source of environmental degradation and climate change. The energy and production needs of business and the consumer desires of the world's people have had a devastating effect on the environment. The U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency regulates over 180 hazardous air pollutants alone. Oil and gas exploration, logging, mining, dams, and many other large-scale projects fundamentally change the environment.

Although consumers in wealthy nations are responsible for most of the world's pollution, populations in China, India, and many other nations contribute increasing amounts and will contribute even more in the future. In mid-January 2013, the Air Quality Index for Beijing climbed to 755. Any reading over 400 is considered hazardous (Economist, 2013). In December 2015, the Chinese government issued a “red alert,” closing schools and limiting outdoor construction for several days as a result of high air pollution levels (Figure 5.2) (BBC, 2015). China has taken strong steps to reduce pollution in Beijing and has seen some success. However, as of March 2019, though the United Nations noted that Beijing has made impressive improvements, the air there still failed to meet World Health Organization recommendations.

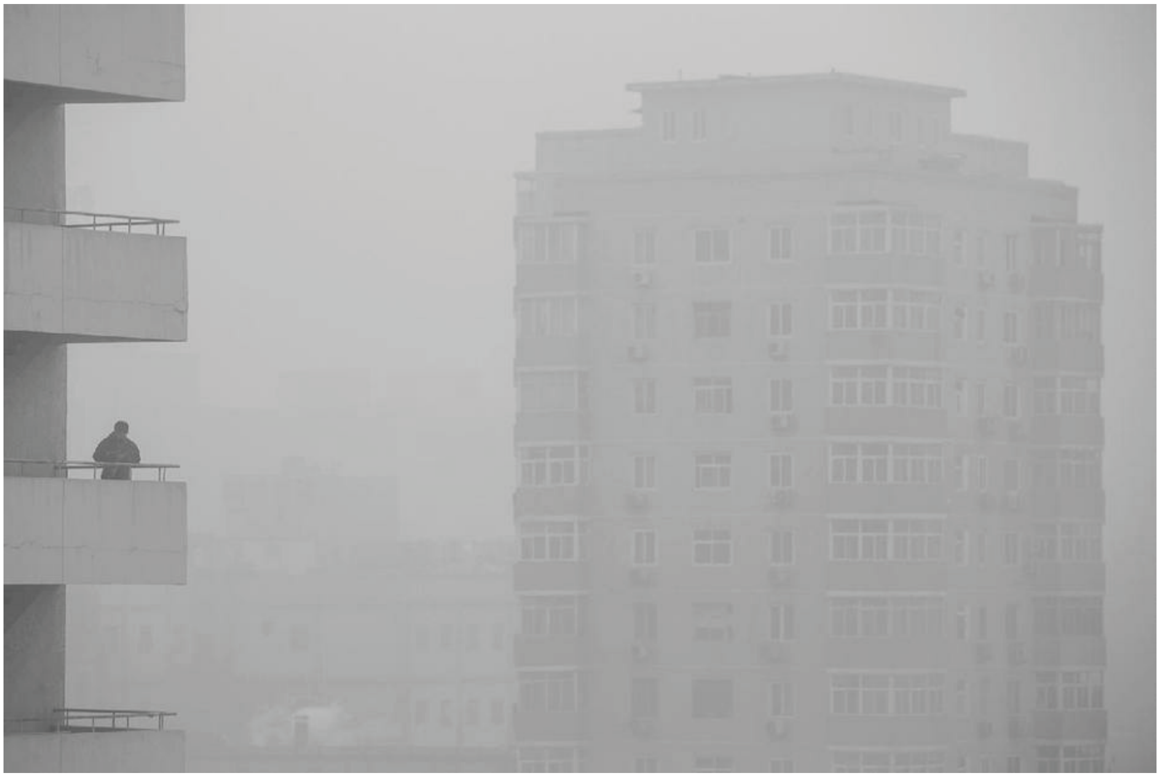


Figure 5.2 Industrialism results in high levels of pollution.

Here a man looks from a balcony during a high smog day in Beijing, China.

Qilai Shen/Bloomberg

The environmental problems resulting from industrial and postindustrial society have reawakened interest in and respect for the subsistence adaptations of nonindustrial people. Through detailed knowledge of their environment and using ingenious, if simple, technology, many nonindustrial societies live in ways that are sustainable and that create fewer environmental problems than does industrialism. However, it is important to recall that current world population levels cannot be maintained by nonindustrial subsistence techniques. We have much to learn from understanding nonindustrial subsistence patterns, but we cannot simply copy them.

Ethnography

The Culinary Thrill Seekers’ Club

Anthropologists spend a great deal of time, as we do in this chapter, thinking and writing about how people produce the different foods they eat. We consider the technologies of production, the implications that they have for social organization, their effect on the environment, their relationship to the way people understand the world, and their religious beliefs. As biologist Rob Dunn and anthropologist Monica Sanchez point out in *Delicious: The Evolution of Flavor and How It Made Us Human* (2021), anthropologists (and biologists) rarely talk about the flavor of foods and the enjoyment people get by eating them. But, in all cultures, when people talk about food, they talk of taste, their likes, and dislikes. As Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) pointed out long ago, there is no society in which people just eat whatever is presented. People, and cultures, always have favorite foods and foods that they like less. Some foods are always preferred over others, for both taste and social prestige, though which foods vary from society to society. Dunn and Sanchez argue that humans and our ancestors weren’t just concerned to consume enough calories of food to survive. They desired food that tasted good. Dunn and Sanchez propose that the search for flavor was one of the major drivers of human biological evolution and tool use among human ancestors, as well as the creation of complex production systems among biologically modern humans.

People’s ideas about what tastes delicious vary from individual to individual and culture to culture. However, in a general sense, flavor is ultimately rooted in biology. Humans, like other living things, must consume certain elements to stay alive. A discipline called biological stoichiometry (pronounced stoy-key-ahm-a-tree) studies the relationships between bodies, food consumption, and waste. Human bodies, and those of other mammals, contain numerous elements in particular proportions. About 96% of your body weight is made up of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen. An additional seven elements—calcium, phosphorous, potassium, sodium, chlorine, magnesium, and sulfur—account for almost all the rest. However, you need tiny amounts of still others, including cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, fluorine, iodine, and iron, to survive (Arizona State University, n.d.). To stay alive, all animals must balance their stoichiometric equations. That is, they must consume foods containing all these chemicals in proportions roughly equal to the chemical composition of their bodies, plus their waste (plus the energy they use in living).

How do humans and animals know what to eat and what not to eat? Virtually all animals have taste cells that detect specific chemicals. Taste cells (in humans we call them taste buds) reward animals for the consumption of specific chemicals with sensations of pleasure and punish the consumption of other chemicals with displeasure. Because we can trace out the neural pathways of taste cells, we know that the activation of taste cells is associated with the release of chemicals associated with pleasure and displeasure. But taste is more than these. It has specific qualities. For example, eating something sweet gives us pleasure but is also a specific sensation. Most other mammals can detect sweetness as well, and we can know that eating something sweet gives them pleasure, but we can’t know what the sensation of sweet is like to others. We can know, for instance, that cats cannot taste sweet. They lack the taste cells that respond to sweet. However, like humans, they have taste cells that sense the unami flavors of meat, and the firing of these cells in both humans and cats is associated with the release of chemicals related to enjoyment. We can’t, however, know what meat tastes like to a cat. It could cause the same taste sensation that sweets do for people.

All animals are particularly concerned to avoid toxic chemicals in their environments; therefore, their taste systems are designed to detect these chemicals and signal displeasure. Bitter taste detector cells register dangerous chemicals. Humans have only one type of detector for sweet tastes, but we have about 26 for bitter tastes (Gravina et al., 2013). Mice have about 35 bitter taste detectors. However, the dangerous chemicals that mice are likely to encounter are mostly different from those that humans are likely to encounter, and the quantities of chemicals that are harmful to mice are different from those harmful to humans. Because of this, there is little overlap between chemicals that mouse bitter taste cells respond to and the ones that humans respond to or the levels of chemicals they detect. Of course, many people like bitter tastes, but more on that in a moment.

Dunn and Sanchez look at food preferences in many different animals, including our nearest biological relations, chimpanzees and bonobos, whose taste cells are very similar to our own. They point out that chimpanzees form different culinary communities. That is, different groups of chimpanzees prefer different foods and have developed different techniques to access them. Chimps use stick tools, and different chimp communities use different tools or, sometimes, the same tools for different purposes. Often, they will use sticks to eat ants or termites. They may spend more energy acquiring these foods than the energy they get from them is worth. This suggests that they are motivated by flavor, rather than simply by the search for calories.

Dunn and Sanchez argue that humans also used tools to access new foods. They were motivated to do so not simply from hunger but rather because the foods that were obtainable with tools were more delicious than those that were not. For example, the long bone marrow that human ancestors probably accessed using stone tools was tastier than most other foods available to them. Honey was extremely tasty, and human ancestors developed tools and techniques to access it. Processing foods, whether through slicing, pounding, cooking, or fermenting, made them more delicious still. They were more flavorful because they contained higher concentrations of the chemicals that humans needed to survive, and thus, they were generally healthier as well. In other words, humans used tools to make the food in their environment more delicious.

Unfortunately, things that taste good are not inevitably good for you. Foods we like continue to taste good, even when we’ve had too much. Humans have learned to manipulate plants and chemicals to produce an abundance of flavors that provide pleasure but no benefits. Sometimes nature may do this as well. For example, *Pentadiplandra brazzeana* is a large shrub found in West-Central Africa. It produces very sweet-tasting red berries that attract many animals. But its berries have very few calories. The animals that eat the berries benefit the plant by spreading its seeds. But the berries have little or no benefit to the animals that are essentially tricked into eating them. Gorillas seem to have developed a genetic adaptation that prevents these berries from tasting good and don’t eat them

(Puschmann, 2016).

Bitter foods, as well as herbs and spices, present a fascinating window into the strong role that culture and learning play in determining tastes. Not all cultures eat bitter foods or use herbs and spices. However, consuming these is extremely widespread among humans and totally unknown among nonhuman animals. The strong tastes of many plants, such as onions, garlic, thyme, and hops, developed to protect those plants from animals that might eat them by signaling the presence of toxins. So, it is curious that humans enjoy them.

Many herbs and spices have antimicrobial effects and help keep food healthier for longer (Gottardi et al., 2016). Alliums such as onion, garlic, scallions, shallots, and leeks are particularly effective at inhibiting food-borne pathogens. Hops, the herb that gives many beers their bitter flavors, is a preservative and was probably first cultivated to be added to beer to make it last longer (DeLyser & Kasper, 1994). Today, commercially brewed beer doesn’t need hops as a preservative but often uses it. As with many other herbs, people like its taste. And this raises interesting questions about people, food, and taste in general.

Spices give the illusion of danger without its reality. Bitter flavors such as those found in hops or coffee signal poison, but we have learned that ingesting these in reasonable quantities will not harm us. Chili peppers and black peppers activate the same receptors that sense physical heat, but we know that they will not burn us. Sensory cells that respond to cold also respond to certain kinds of mint, but we know that eating mint will not freeze us.

Chili peppers probably evolved their heat to protect them from mammals that might eat them. Their seeds are spread by birds, who are not able to taste chilis’ heat. This adaptation is successful, and the peppers are almost never eaten by nonhuman mammals. Dogs who greatly trust their humans or who have no other food available will eat food spiced with chilis. But even they will prefer food without chilis. Humans often love them. This is not simply a matter of food preservation. Alliums are substantially more effective antimicrobial agents than chilis. We eat them primarily for their flavor and the burning sensation they provide. Dunn and Sanchez report that in experiments, people find the food that is most flavorful to be just a little less spicy than the spiciest food they can tolerate. Maybe we all truly are culinary thrill-seekers.

An Overview of Subsistence Strategies

Anthropologists identify five basic types of subsistence strategies: foraging, pastoralism, horticulture, agriculture, and industrialism (Cohen, 1971). **Foraging** depends on the use of plant and animal resources naturally available in the environment. **Pastoralism** primarily involves the care of domesticated herd animals whose dairy and meat products are a major part of the pastoralist diet. **Horticulture** is the production of plants using simple, nonmechanized technology. **Agriculture** is food production that involves more complex technology, which may include draft animals, plows, and sophisticated techniques of water management, soil fertilization, and erosion control. In agriculture, much of the land is under permanent cultivation. Finally, industrialism involves the use of machine technology and chemical processes to produce food and other goods.

Within these basic types of subsistence strategies, there is much diversity. Furthermore, many societies combine strategies to meet their material needs. Today, no society, however seemingly remote, remains unaffected by industrialism and the global economy.

Each subsistence strategy generally supports a characteristic level of population density (number of people per unit of land), productivity (yield per person per unit of land), and efficiency (yield per person per hour of labor invested). These criteria, in turn, tend to be associated with characteristic forms of social organization and certain cultural patterns. For example, in most environments, societies that use a foraging subsistence strategy have relatively low productivity and efficiency (compared with societies using other subsistence strategies). In other words, the total amount of food that can be foraged in most places is relatively small, and as a result, foraging cannot support a large population. This directly links to social practices, because foragers are likely to use cultural practices such as sexual abstinence, abortion, infanticide, late weaning, and prohibitions on sexual intercourse after the birth of a child to limit population growth.

In the sections that follow, we will describe and provide an example of each of the five subsistence strategies, focusing on the relationships between technologies, the structures of society, and cultural practices.

FORAGING

Foraging is a diverse strategy that includes hunting large and small game, fishing, and collecting various plant foods. Foragers do not produce food, either directly by planting or indirectly by keeping domestic animals. In most cases, foragers use simple tools such as digging sticks, spatulas, spears, and bows and arrows. However, in some places, such as the Arctic, foraging technology can be quite complex. Because foragers do not intentionally alter their surroundings to produce food, they usually have less impact on the environment than people following other subsistence strategies.

Foragers use a variety of strategies. In some extreme environments, like the Arctic, they may depend almost entirely on hunting. However, in most cases, they rely primarily on gathered vegetable foods. In most (but not all) foraging societies, women are responsible for gathering and men for hunting. Successful foraging requires extensive and highly detailed knowledge of the environment. Studies among Ju/'hoansi foragers of Botswana and Namibia show that women can identify over 150 species of edible plants, and men can recognize over

40 species of edible animals (Lee, 2003).

Usually, foraging can support only a low population density. Foragers generally live in communities of between 20 and 50 individuals. Even at this low density, few of the areas where current-day foragers are found can support a year-round human population. Therefore, foraging almost always involves seasonal movement to gain access to water or food. Thus, foraging requires independence and mobility. For this reason, foraging bands tend to have highly flexible social arrangements, and values like sharing and reciprocity are common. Seasonal movement is also a strong disincentive for the accumulation of material goods. Because they must frequently transport everything they own, their material possessions tend to be limited to items essential to their survival. In some environments, foraging is unquestionably a harsh and dangerous way of life. However, in less demanding places, foragers often live in relative abundance. Further, the extreme flexibility of forager social arrangements means that there is very little hierarchy in foraging societies.

At one time, all human beings lived by foraging, and foragers occupied fertile plains and river valleys. However, as other forms of production developed, the number of foragers declined. Today, they constitute only a very small proportion of the world's population and are mostly found in marginal areas such as deserts and arctic tundra into which they have been pushed by the expansion of militarily superior agricultural peoples and states.

The Hadza, a Foraging Society in East Africa

The Hadza are one of the most studied of the world’s foraging societies. About 1,000 Hadza occupy a territory of about 4,000 square kilometers around Lake Eyasi in northern Tanzania. Since they are quite close to the equator, the temperature stays about the same year-round. However, there is a dry season, June through November, and a rainy season, December through May. European explorers, colonial officers, and anthropologists have been visiting the Hadza and writing descriptions of them since the 1890s. From these accounts, we know that although many aspects of Hadza culture have changed, the Hadza have still practiced foraging in much the same way that they did in the 19th century until very recently. Anthropologist Frank Marlowe (2010) has provided us with an excellent recent description of Hadza foraging.

Throughout most of the year, the Hadza live in small camps of fewer than 30 people. There is no chief of the camp, nor any political office or level of social organization higher than the camp. The camps are quite mobile. Marlowe found that, on average, they moved between six and seven times a year. There were many reasons the camps moved, but usually, it was either to be close to a specific food source or because the water near a camp had dried up. During the rainy season, water is abundant, and camps tend to be smaller and more widely dispersed. In the dry season, water is more limited, and camps tend to be larger, up to 100 people. In addition to camps moving, individual Hadza move freely from camp to camp. When people disagree or feel that others ask too much of them, they simply leave and find a new camp.

The Hadza have some of the simplest material technology of any society. Marlowe (2010, pp. 72–73) found that, in the early 2000s, Hadza camps had only about 45 kinds of different physical objects. These included digging sticks, fire drills, leather bags, and bows and arrows, as well as items used in religious rituals, jewelry, and some modern items such as plastic beads. Although they have very limited technology, they have an extremely detailed understanding of the plants and animals in their environment.

The Hadza diet includes a truly extraordinary number of different foods: More than 880 different species of plants and animals are eaten (Marlowe, 2010, p. 126). Marlowe analyzed the foods eaten in Hadza camps and found that, by weight, about 27% of it was meat, 8% honey, and the rest fruits, seeds, and tubers.

In small Hadza camps, there is no segregation by sex, and everyone sits and talks together. However, men and women play different roles in foraging. On most days, women wake up early and are ready to leave camp by 8 or 9 a.m. They forage in groups of 3 to 10, often accompanied by young children. One of the main foods they search for is the large tuber. They use their digging sticks to tap the ground, listening for the sounds that indicate tubers are present (Figure 5.3). When women find tubers, they may spend 10 to 20 minutes digging them out. It usually takes the women 2 or 3 hours to accumulate a big pile of tubers. Some are eaten on the spot, but most are brought back to camp to be distributed among family members. In addition to the tubers, women will collect many other kinds of foods, including seeds of the baobab (a large tree species), berries, and fruit. They will also hunt small mammals and collect both tortoises and large land snails.

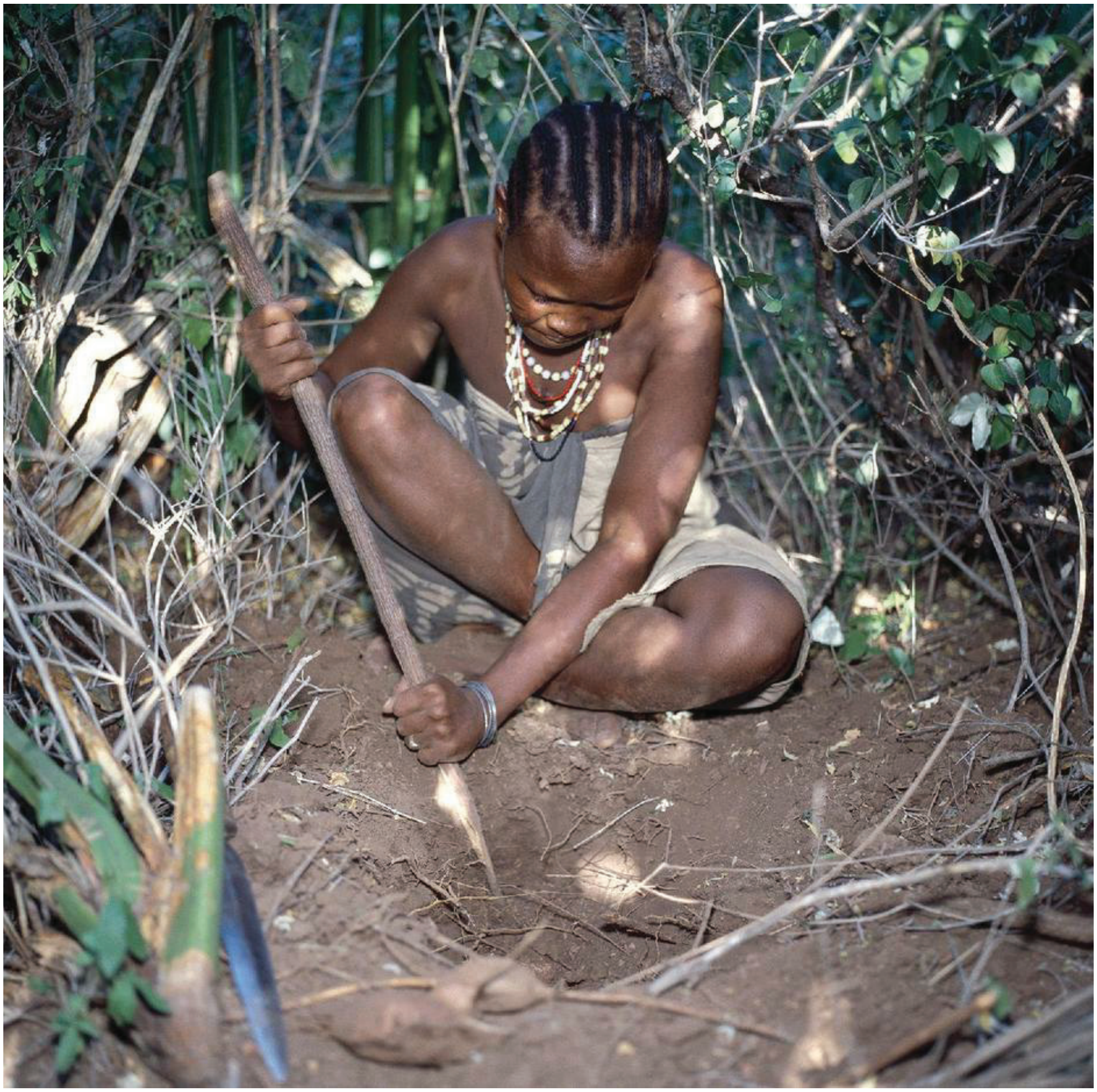


Figure 5.3 A Hadza woman digs tubers.

John Warburton-Lee Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

Women return to camp at around noon. Most of the hours during the hottest time of day are spent napping or socializing. Then, after the day begins to cool, women and children will go to search for firewood and water. They will prepare food and eat just after dark and, on most nights, go to sleep by about 9 p.m.

Men do most of the hunting, including all the hunting of large animals. Unlike the women, who forage in groups, on most days, men hunt alone. Using bow and arrow, they shoot at any prey they encounter, but if they miss or only wound the animal, they rarely follow it. Instead, they wait for the next animal. During the dry season, animals gather at water holes at night, and men hunt at these locations. They go in pairs, so they can take turns sleeping. This tactic helps protect them from lions and other predators. Men also scavenge meat from animals killed by other predators. In fact, scavenging accounts for about 14% of all the meat that Hadza men bring back to camp. Meat is shared by everyone in the camp. In addition to hunting and scavenging, men also collect honey. Bees often make their nests in baobab trees, and men are always looking for good honey trees. Men climb the trees and use smoke to protect themselves from the bees as they take the honey. Some species of bees make nests near the ground, and women will also collect honey if they do not have to climb.

As we have seen, most of the time, men forage alone or with a single male companion, and women forage in all-female groups. However, there are exceptions. Sometimes couples will forage for honey together. In addition, there are times of the year when certain foods are very plentiful and everyone collects them together. In January, when undushipi berries are available, everyone gathers them, and the Hadza may eat little else. Undushipi is a large shrub, and its fruits are sticky, sweet, and slightly astringent (http://tropical.theferns.info/viewtropical.php?id=Cordia+sinens). Later in the spring, enormous flocks of red-billed quelea birds lay eggs, and for several weeks, almost all Hadza collect and eat quelea chicks.

Hadza foraging and lifestyle differ quite a bit from the rainy to the dry seasons. However, there is no season of hunger. Marlowe reports that no Hadza he spoke with could ever recall someone dying of hunger (2010, p. 139). Medical surveys of the Hadza showed that their nutrition and general health were extremely good, better than that of most other rural Africans (Marlowe, 2010, p. 139). However, since the mid-2010s, the Hadza have been increasingly threatened. Neighboring groups have encroached on Hadza land, making it more and more difficult to forage. By 2018, researchers believed that only 100 to 300 Hadza still depended almost entirely on foraging. Instead, they rely increasingly on agricultural labor, tourism, and other paid employment. Anthropologist Colette Berbesque says that the Hadza are “transitioning to a life where they’re at the absolute bottom of the barrel” (quoted in Gibbons, 2018).

The Inuit: Foraging and Global Warming

All foragers exploit the diversity of their environments, which, in most cases, means they rely more on collecting vegetable food than on hunting. The Inuit of the Arctic Circle are an exception. Their subsistence strategy includes almost no collecting of plant food, as this food source is virtually absent in their environment. However, as is typical for most foragers, the Inuit food quest follows the seasonal variation of their climate—a long, cold winter during, which the water areas become sheets of ice, and a short, cool summer.

For thousands of years, the Inuit hunted large land and sea animals, including caribou, polar bear, seal, walrus, and whales. They devised technologies that effectively utilized the materials of their environment for survival, building shelters of snow, which hold the heat and keep out the wind, and expertly fashioning layered clothing that keeps out the cold yet prevents overheating.

Their culture and social organization are also adapted to their environment and foraging strategy. Their values emphasize cooperation and mutual aid; their religious rituals provide effective outlets for the isolation and tension of the long dark winters, and their flexible kinship organization allows local populations to expand and contract in response to the seasonal variation in resources. For the Inuit of Baffin Island, this involves a set of economic practices called *ningiqtuq*, best translated as “sharing.” *Ningiqtuq* orders the flow of goods and food across individuals, families, and entire communities. Among the Inuit, no one need go without food or shelter. Inuit subsistence isn’t just about food. It is also about practices that provide individuals with security (Wenzel, 2009, pp. 92–93).

As with many other foragers, however, the 20th and 21st centuries have brought great changes in Inuit subsistence strategies. Most Inuit now base their livelihoods on a combination of subsistence foraging and cash income from a variety of sources. By the early 20th century, the Western demand for furs replaced the Inuit subsistence hunting with commercial trapping, providing many Inuit with guns and cash, which they then used to buy food, tobacco, tea, canvas tents, and clothing. Sources of Inuit income today include handicrafts, tourism, various kinds of government subsidies, and, for the Alaska Inuit, payments from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Wild foods, such as moose, caribou, whales, ducks, fish, and other wildlife, continue to provide half or more of the Inuit diet. However, Inuit foragers today make significant use of modern technology such as snowmobiles, gasoline, fishing nets, and sleeping bags. Many Inuit households enjoy modern conveniences, and the costs of these conveniences require household members to work full-time or seasonally in the cash economy (Kofinas, 2007).

Because foragers live so close to the land, depending on their intimate knowledge of its plant and animal species, they are easily affected by climate change. This vulnerability is exacerbated because a wide variety of physical mechanisms leads to climate change, which is more extreme in the Arctic than other places, a phenomenon known as arctic amplification (Previdi, 2021). The transformation of water areas into ice during the long, cold winters has always been essential to the Inuit foraging strategy. Sea ice is used as a highway, formerly for dog sleds and now for snowmobiles, for building materials, and for hunting platforms. However, winter ice is disappearing. Danny Gordon, a 70-year-old Inuit man from the Yukon in Canada, said, “In the summer 40 years ago, we had lots of icebergs, and you could land your boat on them and climb on them even in summer. … Now in the winter they are tiny. The weather has changed” (in Myers et al., 2005, p. A1).

Due to global warming, icebergs and the permafrost are melting at an accelerating rate, making it more difficult for Inuit marine hunters to maintain their cultures and their historic ways of making a living. The shrinking ice makes it harder for polar bears to fatten up on seals, and the bears are becoming emaciated. Alaskan whale hunters in the open seas have seen walruses try to climb onto their white boats, mistaking them for ice floes. The pelts of fox, marten, and other game are thinning, and even seasoned hunters are falling into water that used to be ice.

Figure 5.4 Sea ice is critical to the survival of animals, including polar bears, seals, and walrus, and to the people who depend on hunting these animals.

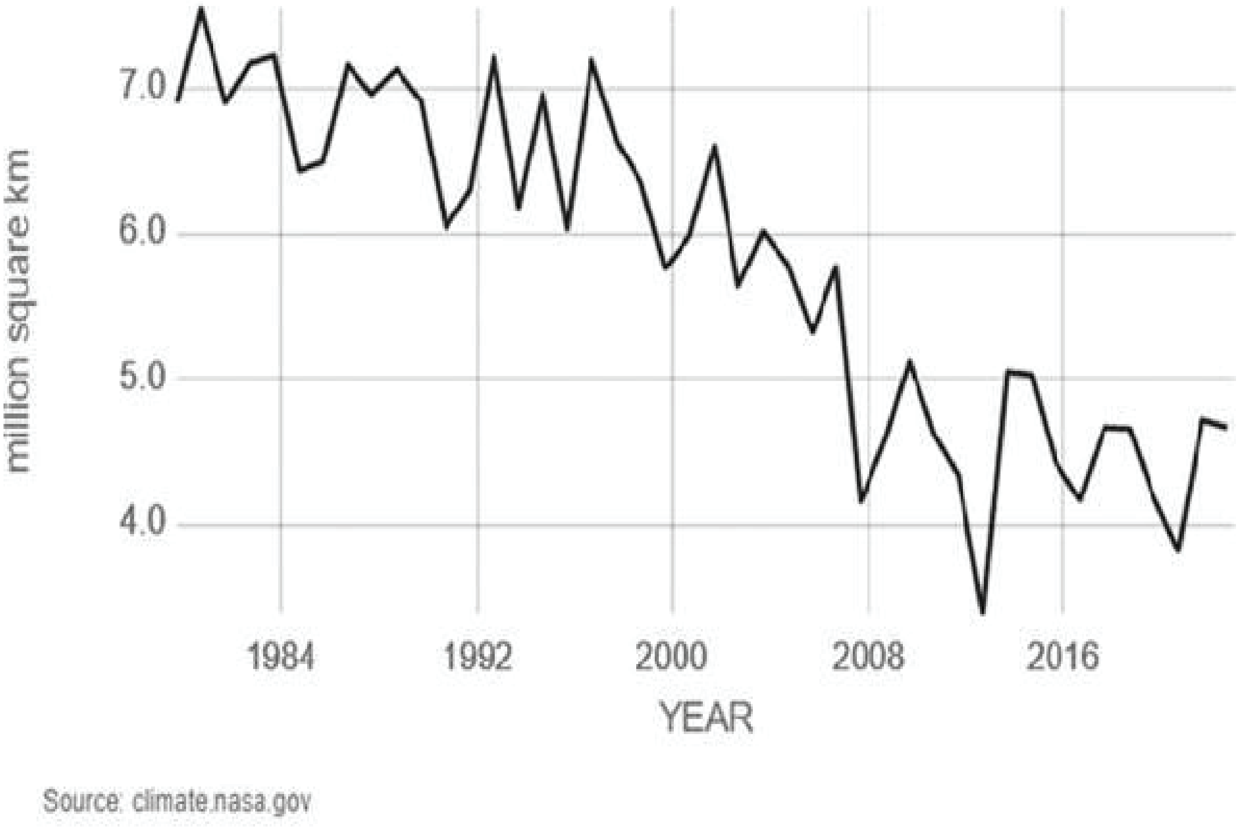
iStockphoto.com/ekvals

The Gwich’in are one of the many foraging groups in northeastern Alaska and northwestern Canada that have been affected by global warming. Matthew Gilbert, a member of the Gwich’in Nation, wrote, “Gwich’in elders long ago predicted that a day would come when the world would warm and things would not be the same with the animals. That time is now. … The lakes, the rivers, the waterfowl and, most of all, the caribou that we depend on are under threat” (Gilbert, 2007, 2012).

The 8,000 Gwich’in live in small villages spread across the huge subarctic tundra and forest. There are thousands of lakes and scores of rivers on their land. Caribou herds that also occupy this area are the main source of Gwich’in subsistence. But climate change has decreased the number of caribou, which are also less healthy than before. Because of early river thaws, many caribou calves drown crossing the rushing river waters, the glaciers and snow pockets that provide essential resting places for mothers and their calves are disappearing, and the caribou must move farther north, out of their usual territory. This makes it harder for the hunters to find them, and hunting has to begin later in the season than normal.

Like many other Arctic groups, the Gwich’in also hunt animals such as polar bears, seals, and walrus. Sea ice is critical to the survival of these animals, but it is disappearing. Although there are year-to-year variations, satellite data show an Arctic sea ice decline of more than 13% per decade relative to the 1980 to 2010 average (https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/arctic-sea-ice/). The 2012 ice minimum of 3.39 million square kilometers (the measurement in September before waters began to freeze again), the lowest on record so far, was less than half of the 1980s average of 6.84 million square kilometers (NOAA, 2021)[1] (see Figure 5.5). As the climate warms and ice melts, hunting becomes more difficult and the cultural patterns it sustains become more fragile.

[1] Figures calculated from the data at https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/arctic-sea-ice/. You can see animations of the changes in the yearly ice minimum on that page.



Source: climate.nasa.gov

Description

Figure 5.5

The Gwich'in and many other native peoples have struggled to make their voices heard and slow down the pace of climate change. In their own lands, they are adopting alternative forms of energy generation. The village of Old Crow is building a 940-kilowatt solar array that will reduce its carbon footprint by 24% (Murray, 2018). In March 2019, Old

Crow leader Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, one of the youngest chiefs ever elected in Canada, traveled to testify to a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on the impact of climate change and oil and gas drilling in the Arctic. Speaking in support of House Resolution 1146, the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, Chief Tizya-Tramm pled for his people. He said, “Gwich'in … are a caribou people. … *Vahdzaii* (caribou) is known as the lifeblood of our people.” The caribou herd “carries the spirit, intent, and founding of our nation.” Its loss will result in the “cultural genocide of the entire Gwich'in Nation” (Tizya-Tramm, 2019, pp. 17–19). Though it was passed by the House of Representatives, H.R. 1146 was not acted on by the Senate and so did not pass in the 2019–2020 Congress. A new version of the bill was introduced in the Senate in 2021, but so far, little action has been taken.

On May 10, 2019, officials in Old Crow, led by Tizya-Tramm, declared a climate change state of emergency. Old Crow became the first indigenous community to make such a declaration. Tizya-Tramm said, “It’s going to be the blink of an eye before my great grandchild is living in a completely different territory, and if that’s not an emergency, I don’t know what is” (Avery, 2019). Tizya-Tramm hopes to unite Arctic people in a campaign to slow climate change. However, strong forces are arrayed against them: energy companies, powerful governments, and many other interests. At the first Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit in June 2019, an Inupiat leader said, “We are proud to hang on to what we have, hardship is not new for Indigenous people. Survival involves earth, air, sun, water. It’s going to take all our energy to say no” (Norrgard, 2019).

In October 2021, indigenous leaders and climate activists from across the United States came to Washington, DC for a 5- day-long People vs. Fossil Fuels protest (Figure 5.6). They called on the Biden administration to take action to control fossil fuel use and stop climate change. Clashes between police and protestors resulted in almost 150 arrests (Silverman, 2021).

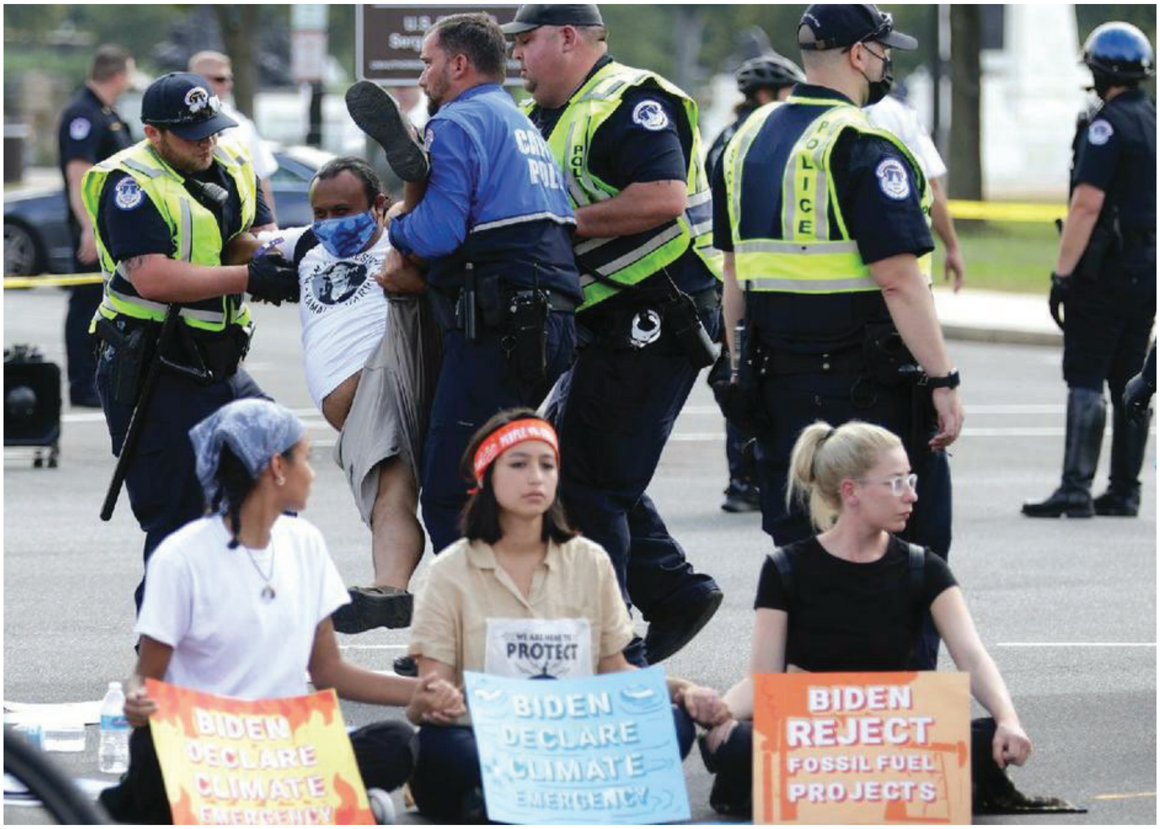

BIDEN DECLARE CLIMATE EMERGENCY
WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT
BIDEN DECLARE CLIMATE EMERGENCY
BIDEN REJECT FOSSIL FUEL PROJECTS
POLICE

Figure 5.6 Members of U.S. Capitol Police arrest a climate activist as he participates in civil disobedience during the “People vs Fossil Fuels” protests in Washington, D.C. on October 15, 2021, .

Alex Wong/Getty Images

PASTORALISM

Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy in which people depend primarily on the products of domesticated herd animals. Pastoralist societies are found mostly in environments that, because of hilly terrain, dry climate, or unsuitable soil, cannot support a large human population through agriculture. However, these places can support herd animals if they are allowed to range over a large area. Because human beings cannot digest grass, but ruminants such as cattle, sheep, goats, and camelids like llama, alpaca, and camels can, raising them can make pastoralism an efficient way to exploit grasslands. Unlike commercial animal husbandry, in which livestock are fed grain that could be used to feed humans, pastoralism does not require that animals and humans compete for the same resources (Barfield, 1993, p. 13).

The animals herded by pastoralists produce meat, milk, and blood. The major areas of pastoralism are found in East Africa (cattle), North Africa (camels), southwestern Asia (sheep and goats), central Asia (yaks), and the subarctic (caribou and reindeer). Herds of llama and alpaca were maintained in the South American Andes, but North America had no animals that could be easily domesticated and herded. So, before the European invasions of the late 15th and 16th centuries, pastoralism was much less common there.

Transhumant pastoralists move their animals in a seasonal cycle. They visit roughly the same locations at the same time every year. Transhumant pastoralists usually have permanent homes, and only part of the society, usually men and boys, moves with the animals. Transhumance is found in many places, including East Africa, the Middle East, and the Alps region of Europe, as well as among the Navajo and other Native American groups in the southwestern United States. In these cases, people establish permanent villages. Men and boys move the animals to different areas as pastures become available at different altitudes or in different climatic zones. Women, children, and some men remain at the permanent village site. In **nomadic pastoralism**, the whole population—men, women, and children—moves with the herds throughout the year, and there are no permanent villages. This sort of pastoralism is less common but is practiced among some groups in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (Rao & Casimir, 1982; Rodríguez, 1994).

Pastoralism involves a complex interaction among animals, land, and people. With domestication, animals became dependent on their human keepers for pasture, water, breeding, shelter, salt, and protection from predators. Pastoralists must be highly knowledgeable about the needs of their animals, the carrying capacity of the land, and the subsistence demands of the human population.

The key to the pastoralist economy is herd growth. The number of animals needed to support a family is a constant concern for pastoralists. Eating or selling too many animals in a single year may lead to economic disaster, so pastoralists must always balance their present needs against future herd production. However, animals are also a source of wealth and prestige among pastoralists, so they may also keep herd sizes well above any immediate need. Pastoralism is a risky business; weather disasters such as drought or storms, disease, or theft can easily decimate a herd.

Although there are some groups, such as the indigenous people of Chukotka (far northeastern Siberia, near Alaska), who eat diets almost entirely composed of meat and fish (Berezovikova & Mamleeva, 2001), most pastoralists also need access to grains and other agricultural products. Often, pastoralists’ survival depends upon relationships with their sedentary neighbors, with whom they trade meat animals, wool, milk products, and hides for grain and manufactured goods. In other cases, pastoralists spend part of the year raising grain and other crops.

The Maasai of East Africa: A Transhumant Pastoral Adaptation

The Maasai, one of the many cattle cultures of East Africa, live in the semiarid grasslands (savanna) of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. Like the Hadza, whose territory theirs adjoins, the Maasai have been studied by outsiders for more than 100 years. The Maasai number between 375,000 and more than a million. They range over tens of thousands of square kilometers in southeastern Kenya and northern Tanzania. Their diet historically consisted primarily of the blood and milk of their cattle, supplemented by other resources such as grain or fish (Coast, 2001).

The Maasai environment is full of uncertainties, and they have survived by developing a flexible subsistence strategy exploiting multiple ecological niches. The knowledge necessary to survive under these conditions is passed down from parents to children. Men's knowledge focuses primarily on the information most necessary to move and control livestock effectively. Women's knowledge focuses more on types of medicinal plants and the availability of water. Up-to-date information about the different areas in the region is shared through extended kin and trading networks and at markets and ritual celebrations. Now, cell phones play a critical role in providing information about rainfall and pasturage (Mason, 2007).

Maasai resource management is a system of specialized herding well suited to East Africa's savanna and critically determined by various environmental factors such as elevation, the distribution of lakes and rivers, seasonal rainfall, and vegetation. The most important factor is seasonal rainfall. Like the Hadza, the Maasai experience a dry season from June through November and a rainy season from December through May.

The dry season is often a period of hunger and scarcity. Maasai communities and livestock concentrate around permanent water points. They build homes close enough to the water holes to have easy access but far enough away from each other to reduce the likelihood of overgrazing. At least some members of Maasai households inhabit these homes year-round.

The number of animals concentrated near permanent water during the dry season often runs into several thousand, so cattle are permitted to drink only according to the elaborate rotation schedules the elders set up. The system depends on a waiting area, the water point itself, and a large dry-season pasturage area, as well as having livestock well able to resist drought. Livestock are watered on alternate days. On their days to be watered, livestock are taken to the queuing area in the morning; then, in their turn, moved to the water point; and then, after watering, moved to the dry-season pasture. There they graze, returning home in the evening (Figure 5.7).

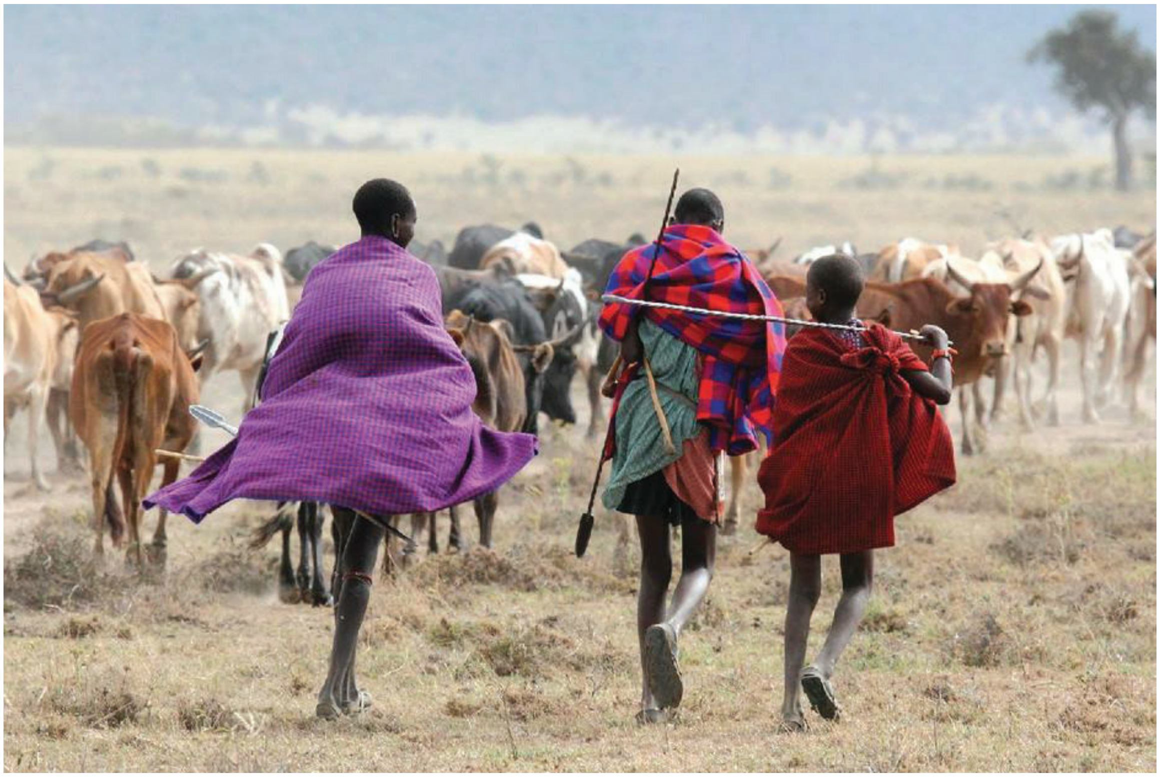


Figure 5.7 Maasai boys herd cattle during the dry season.

Arterra/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

When the rains begin in December, the young men take the mature and healthy stock to the wet-season pasturage areas, where they live in temporary camps and there is an abundance of water and rich pasture. This allows the dry-season pasture to recover. Most of the women, children, and elder men remain in the permanent homesteads with the sick, immature, and lactating animals. Household heads check on their sons and herds periodically. At the end of the wet season, in May or June, the young men return with the livestock to the permanent homesteads, and a new cycle begins.

The drought reserve is a critical adaptive feature of the Maasai subsistence strategy. Members of the community agree to set aside relatively large areas of water and pasture that never dry up, even during the worst years of drought. These areas are usually swamps, lakes, or mountain springs at relatively high elevations. During normal years, the Maasai do not bring their herds to these areas. When a drought occurs, herders will come from as far as a hundred miles away. Although animals do die during severe droughts, the drought reserve permits enough to survive so that the herd can recover.

The Maasai also build flexibility into their adaptive strategy by treating land as common property. Access to pasture and water is regulated and negotiated by a council of local elders representing the community. Kinship and clan membership, as well as membership in a system of age grades, build extensive social networks that ensure maximum flexibility, giving herders multiple options for moving herds. The Maasai adaptation also depends on exchange; in some areas, the Maasai exchange small stock and milk for honey, an essential ingredient in the honey beer used in all Maasai ceremonial occasions. Some Maasai also encourage farmers to settle among them. Where farmers have settled on riverbanks, establishing small-scale farms, they exchange fish, grains, fruit, and vegetables with the Maasai. When the farmers earn cash by selling their products in the markets, they use some of it to buy livestock and milk from the Maasai, who in turn use the cash to buy clothing, phones, aluminum cooking pots, iron spearheads, and veterinary medicine.

The Maasai strategy depends on having access to an enormous amount of land. Maasai territory probably reached its maximum extent in the late 19th century. However, since then, interactions with the colonial and independent governments of Kenya and Tanzania, as well as with settlers and local agricultural groups, have greatly reduced Maasai territory. As a result, it has become more and more difficult for them to practice their transhumant pastoralist strategy. Much of their best grazing land, as well as their drought reserves, was also suitable for forestry, agriculture, and stall-fed livestock. Europeans took over these areas during the colonial period, and their descendants still own some of the land. However, much is now controlled by local farmers. Additionally, much Maasai land has been set aside for national parks and game reserves that both preserve wildlife and attract tourism. The Maasai themselves have become an internationally known tourist attraction, but they rarely profit much from this (Rushby, 2011). In recent years, rubies were discovered in Maasai territory, and their land is now threatened by mining as well (Dworzak & Scheinman, 2018).

As Maasai herding has increasingly been circumscribed, much herding knowledge has been lost. Although the Maasai had coexisted with wild grazing herds and indeed imitated the seasonal patterns of the herds, today they are largely shut out of conservation policy making. Development planners often regard them as obstacles to the most effective use of the Maasai's own land. The changing Maasai subsistence strategy illustrates the effect of global economics and global values, such as wildlife conservation, on local communities.

The Yarahmadzai: Nomadic Pastoralists

Nomadic pastoralist societies tend to be based on patrilineal kinship. In Southwest Asia, these societies are characteristically organized into supratribal confederations, with powerful leaders allied in regional political networks. In the past, these confederations were technically subordinated to various empires on the Iranian and Anatolian plateaus. However, nomads were seldom effectively controlled by the empires. For the past 200 years, pastoralists have had to adapt to the policies set by distant governments of centralized nation-states and have lost most of their political and military autonomy (Barfield, 1993, p. 206).

Phillip Carl Salzman, a key ethnographer of the Yarahmadzai, notes that "nomadism is not 'wandering' in the sense of purposeless or directionless movement." Nomads move to achieve specific goals. Nor is it "'wandering' in the sense of moving off in any direction." Nomads move within specific territories. Salzman (2002) notes that nomads do not live to move; rather, they move to live (pp. 249, 261).

Yarahmadzai is the traditional name of camel nomads who live in the southeastern corner of Iran known as Balochistan. They have a mixed pastoralist adaptation that has undergone changes due to both the global economy and the restraints of adapting to the control of the nation-state (Salzman, 2000). The Yarahmadzai occupy a plateau at 5,000 feet above sea level, where their chief environmental problem is finding adequate water and pasture year-round. They solve this by moving to seek pastures according to the seasons (Figure 5.8).

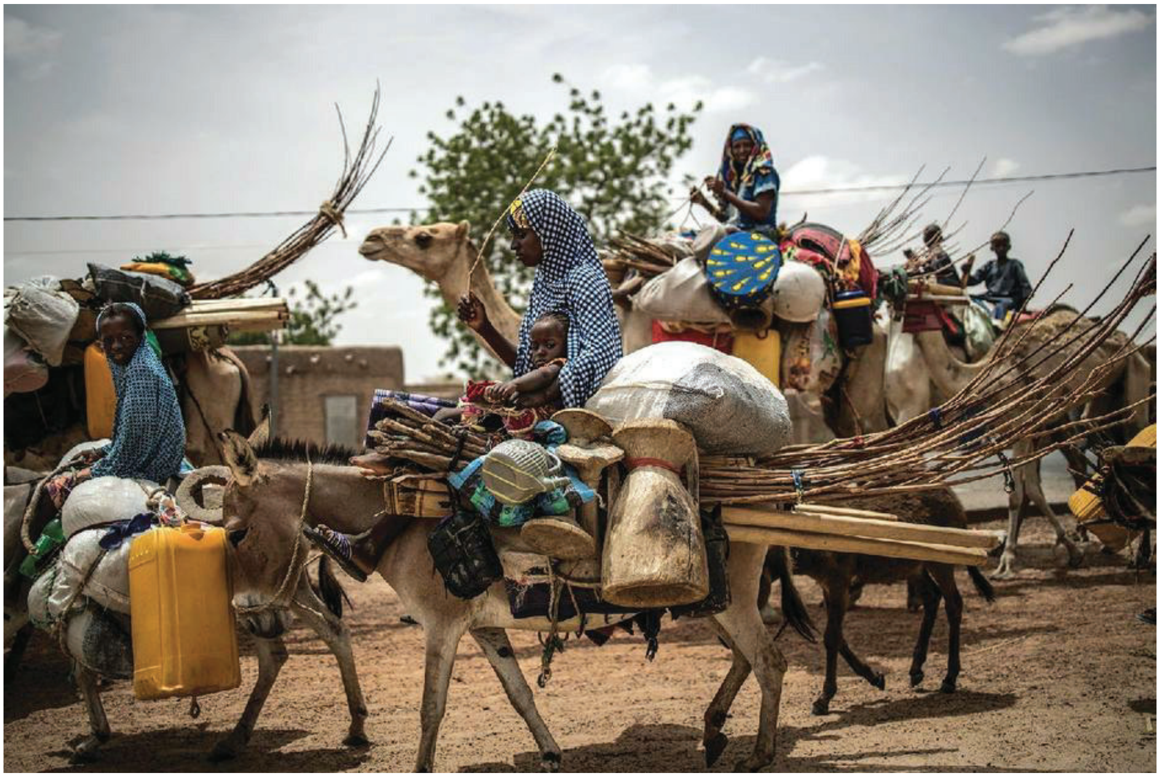


Figure 5.8 In transhumant pastoralism, people establish permanent villages. Men and boys move the animals to different areas as pastures become available at different altitudes or in different climatic zones. Here, a group of Fulani nomads moves camp in Niger.

MARCO LONGARI/AFP via Getty Images

For much of the year, the Yarahmadzai live in small camps of between 5 and 20 families. When information about good pasture becomes available, the whole Yarahmadzai camp migrates. Because even good pasturage is quickly exhausted, the camp moves frequently, anywhere from 5 to 25 miles in each time.

Most of the 6-inch annual rainfall occurs in the winter. Thus, there is good pasturage on the Yarahmadzai's high plateau in the spring. However, by June and July, the animals have eaten all of the spring's growth and the season has turned very dry and hot. In response, the Yarahmadzai migrate to areas served by government irrigation projects and earn money harvesting grain. They remain there until the harvest ends in early autumn. Then they migrate to the lowland desert, where there are groves of date palms, leaving their tents, as well as their goats and sheep, on the plateau in the care of young boys. During this time, they harvest dates and prepare date preserves for the return journey to their winter camps. Those who farm in addition to herding plant grain, and many women work for cash in nearby towns. In November, the Yarahmadzai return to their winter camps. At this time, the Yarahmadzai plateau is almost completely barren. There is water, but very little for the animals to eat. They live on their accumulated fat and small quantities of roots, grains, dates, and processed date pits that their keepers provide. The people depend on food stores from the previous year.

Milk is the Yarahmadzai staple food and main source of protein. It is consumed fresh and preserved as dried milk solids and butter. Milk and milk products are also sold and exchanged for grain.

The Yarahmadzai, like most other pastoral peoples, do not eat much meat. Their flocks are their capital, and the Yarahmadzai hope to increase their size. Because killing animals for food works against this objective, the Yarahmadzai rarely do it (Salzman, 1999, p. 24).

Like most contemporary pastoralists, then, the Yarahmadzai combine herding with other subsistence strategies to earn a living. Many pastoralists now depend less on consuming the direct products of their herds—milk, wool, and meat—and more on the sale of animals and animal products for cash. In this sense, many nomadic pastoralists are becoming ranchers: pastoral specialists in a cash economy.

Pastoralists today are often successful in adapting their products to local and even global markets. Nomads in Afghanistan and Iran, for example, are highly integrated into national and international trade networks. They specialize in selling meat animals to local markets, lambskins to international buyers, and sheep intestines to meet the huge German demand for natural sausage casings (Barfield, 1993, p. 211).

Critics of nomadic pastoralism claim that the individual pastoralist's desire to increase the size of his herds inevitably leads to collective overgrazing and the destruction of grasslands. But pastoralists are aware of this potential problem and in varied ways restrict access to common pasture (Barfield, 1993, p. 214). Indeed, government policies that attempt to restrict nomadic use of pastoralist territories in order to make those territories productive for agriculture often directly and indirectly exacerbate environmental degradation. This, as well as many other issues, has led to longstanding and violent conflict between the government, the Yarahmadzai, and other Baloch nomadic groups. Baloch groups have fought in violent conflicts against the different governments of Iran and Pakistan since the end of World War II. The conflict has been relatively small scale since 2012, but state control over these nomadic people is tenuous (Katona, 2016).

Pastoralism cannot support an indefinitely increasing population, and many pastoralists have already become sedentary. But with pastoralists' knowledge of their environment, their creative use of multiple resources, and global demand for their products, pastoralism as a subsistence strategy has a strong future.

HORTICULTURE

Horticultural societies depend primarily on the production of plants using gardens and simple, nonmechanized technology such as hoes or digging sticks, but not draft animals, irrigation techniques, or plows. Gardens are used for several years and then allowed to recover their fertility over a long fallow period, sometimes lasting decades.

In most cases, horticulture produces a lower yield per acre and uses less human labor than agriculture. Horticulturalists grow enough food in their fields or gardens to support the local group, but they do not produce large surpluses and usually have only minimal involvement with wider market systems. Population densities among horticultural peoples are generally low, usually not exceeding 150 people per square mile (Netting, 1977). Despite this, horticultural villages may be quite large, ranging from 100 to 1,000 people.

Horticulture may be practiced in dry lands—such as northeastern Arizona, where the Hopi Indians cultivate maize, beans, and squash—but is typically a tropical forest adaptation. In these environments, people practice **swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivation**, clearing fields by felling trees and burning the brush. The burned vegetation is allowed to remain on the soil, which prevents it from drying out. The resulting bed of ash also acts as a fertilizer, returning nutrients to the soil. Fields are used for 1 to 5 years and then allowed to lie fallow for up to 20 years or more so that the forest cover can be rebuilt and soil fertility restored. Swidden cultivators require five to six times as much fallow land as they are cultivating.

Swidden can have a debilitating effect on the environment if fields are cultivated before they have lain fallow long enough to recover their forest growth. Eventually, the forest will not grow back, and grasslands will replace the tree cover. Because of this, governments often consider swidden cultivation both inefficient and destructive. However, modern industrial strategies such as logging and agribusiness, not swidden cultivation, are mainly responsible for the deterioration and disappearance of tropical forests (Sponsel, 1995). Studies show that soil fertility is better preserved using long-fallow swidden agriculture than using annual cropping or tree plantations (Bruun et al., 2009) and that replacing swidden with intensified agriculture can lead to swift environmental deterioration (Rerkasem et al., 2009).

Horticulture is also a mixed-subsistence strategy. Most swidden cultivators grow several crops. They may also hunt, fish, or raise some domestic animals. In New Guinea, for example, domestic pigs are an important source of protein, and in the Amazon rainforest, the Yanomamo hunt monkeys and other animals. The Kofyar of Nigeria practice a wide range of strategies, including swidden agriculture, keeping domesticated animals, and participating in the global economy (Stone, 1998).

Because of the very diverse environments of swidden cultivation, horticulturalists have diverse cultures. Most horticulturalists shift residences as they move their fields, but some occupy villages permanently or at least on a long-term basis (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9 Horticulture based on swidden or slash-and-burn techniques, as practiced in northern Thailand, is based on a deep understanding of the forest environment. Here a woman from the Akha ethnic group heads to work on her garden.

Rio Helmi/LightRocket via Getty Images

The Lua': A Horticultural Society in Southeast Asia

More than 4,000 Lua' swidden cultivators live in Mae Hong Son, a province of northern Thailand (Kunstadter, 1978; Figure 5.8). Their land is mostly mountainous tropical forest and savanna. There is a rainy season from April through November and a dry season from December through March. Temperatures are always warm. The Lua' cultivate swidden gardens in a regular rotational sequence. After using a block of land for 1 or 2 years, villagers allow it to lie fallow for about 9 years before planting it again.

In January, village elders inspect the gardens they want to use the following year to confirm that the forest regrowth is adequate for cultivation. Using long steel-bladed knives, the men clear their fields by felling small trees. They leave taller trees standing but trim their branches so they will not shade the crops. They also leave trees along watercourses and at the tops of ridges to prevent erosion and provide seed sources for forest regrowth during the fallow period. Such Lua' practices encourage ecosystem diversity (Rerkasem et al., 2009).

The fields cleared in January and February dry until the end of March, when a day is chosen to burn them. First, a firebreak is cleared around the field so that fire does not accidentally spread into the forest. Then the swidden is burned. The men doing the work usually carry guns, hoping game animals such as boar or barking deer will run toward them out of the burning fields, although this happens less today than in the past.

Each section of the swiddens is planted with crops chosen to make the best use of its fertility, soil moisture, and potential for erosion. Cotton and corn are planted on the slopes of the fields and yams on the lower, wetter portions. By mid-April, the Lua begin to plant the main subsistence crop, upland rice, jabbing the earth loose with 10-foot iron-tipped planting poles. They hope the rice will take root and sprout before the heavy monsoon rains come.

Different types of rice are sown in different areas of the field. Quick-ripening rice is planted near the field shelter, where it can be watched easily. Drought-resistant varieties are planted on the drier, sandier tops of the slopes, along with millet. Many kinds of viny plants, such as squashes, melons, and gourds, are also planted. Onions, garlic, and herbs, such as coriander, lemongrass, and mint, are grown in the swiddens, along with mustard greens, peppers, beans, and other vegetables (Kunstadter, 1978, p. 142).

By May, weeding begins. Women and older children use short-handled tools to scrape and hack at the weeds on the surface; weeds are not dug or pulled out by the roots.

Both men and women harvest the rice, using small, handheld sickles, cutting the stems of each bunch of rice close to the ground. The stalks are spread out to dry for a few days, and then young men beat them against a threshing mat to knock the rice grains loose, separating them as completely as possible. Older men beat the broken stalks with bamboo threshing sticks and use bamboo winnowing fans to separate the grain and chaff. After a second winnowing, the cleaned rice is loaded into baskets and kept in a temporary barn near the field shelter.

After the harvest, swiddens are allowed to lie fallow. However, the Lua' also keep pigs, water buffalo, cattle, and chickens, and these animals eat the plants that grow on the fallow gardens. Villagers also use these fields as a sources of the medicines, dyes for homespun clothing, and material for weaving baskets and building houses. The wild fruits and yams that grow on fallow land are particularly important during food shortages.

By the mid-20th century, many newcomers had begun to settle in Lua' territory. They were less careful about their swidden practices than the Lua', and the quality of the land began to deteriorate. The government, through environmental regulations and the promotion of development projects, pressured the Lua' to limit their use of swiddens (Delcore, 2007, p. 96). The result has been an increase in intensive agriculture and cattle herding. Many crops such as sorghum and cotton have been severely reduced or eliminated. Cattle now graze the fallow swiddens, leaving few plants for human use. Cash cropping of soybeans has transformed the previously clear and free-flowing streams to muddy, polluted pools, which the Lua' consider too dirty to wash their clothes in, and year-round irrigation has brought in year-round mosquitoes.

The changes in swidden practices among the Lua' are typical of trends in Southeast Asia and perhaps worldwide. Rising population, pressure toward industrial agriculture from governments and corporations, and the desire of farmers to raise and sell cash crops all work against swidden agriculture. A 2012 analysis of swidden around the world showed that where people have access to national and global markets, swidden is being replaced by cattle production and cash cropping (Van Vliet et al., 2012). In Southeast Asia, the move away from swidden is reflected in shorter fallow times. Farmers maintain swidden but increasingly add cash cropping and intensified animal husbandry alongside it (Schmidt-Vogt et al., 2009). These changes do bring some benefits. Households had increased overall income. But, these benefits came with high costs, including environmental degradation and increased household insecurity (Dressler et al., 2017). Increasing participation in large markets and the move away from swidden farming will have profound and perhaps largely negative cultural consequences for the Lua' and other groups.

Using Anthropology

Anthropologists and Nutrition

Anthropologists have long been involved in trying to understand the foods that people eat and their effect on health and nutrition. Some nutritional anthropologists are concerned with trying to improve the nutritional status of people. Others are more concerned to discover what we can or cannot learn from the diets of various groups.

The work of the husband and wife team of Nevin Scrimshaw (1918–2013) and Mary Goodrich (1920–2014) is a good example of the first. Scrimshaw was one of the world's most important nutrition scientists and was trained in biology, physiology, medicine, and public health. Goodrich, his wife, was trained in nutritional anthropology. As a doctor working in Central America after World War II, Scrimshaw was struck by the large number of young children who suffered from protein malnutrition. He designed a cheap protein source based on cottonseed meal that was both culturally acceptable and extremely inexpensive. He did the same with a peanut-based product in India in the 1960s. He also worked to find ways to add goiter-preventing iodine to the types of salt available in Central America. Goodrich introduced anthropological data into Scrimshaw’s studies. They worked together in Guatemala, Indonesia, and many other places (Martin, 2013; Scrimshaw, 2012).

When Scrimshaw helped found the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, a direct aid and research organization that works to provide food security in seven Central American countries, he sought advice from well-known anthropologists. As the institute's first director, he brought in anthropologists, including Richard Adams and Nancie Solien de González, to help guide the institute's policies, particularly toward native Mayan populations (Scrimshaw, 2012). Scrimshaw and Goodrich’s daughter, medical anthropologist Susan Scrimshaw, formerly president of The Sage Colleges, was, in 2021, chair of the board of the International Nutrition Foundation, founded by Nevin Scrimshaw in 1982.

James Howe's work among the Kuna is an example of anthropologists learning from the diets of different societies. The Kuna are a large ethnic group living mostly in Panama. They have received a lot of attention because of claims that their high level of cocoa consumption was linked to lower rates of cardiovascular disease. Norman Hollenberg, the lead researcher of many of the studies, claimed that the high consumption of locally grown chocolate by rural Kuna explained the fact that they had far lower levels of hypertension and heart disease than Kuna living in urban areas such as Panama City. According to Hollenberg et al. (2009), the rural Kuna consumed a minimum of 35 cups of a chocolate drink a week and that this was associated with their good health.

Unfortunately for the chocolate lovers among us, Howe's work shows that Hollenberg's assertions about Kuna chocolate consumption are simply incorrect (Howe, 2012, p. 45). Although the Kuna do drink chocolate, they consume far less of it than Hollenberg states, and much of that is commercial powdered chocolate. They do use cacao beans in religious ceremonies—but by burning them rather than drinking chocolate. Howe notes that the rural Kuna diet is low in fat and higher in fruit and fish than that of urban dwellers in general and that this is far more likely to explain their better health than is chocolate consumption. Hollenberg, he says, makes the mistake of basing health claims for chocolate on the Kuna because he neither spent sufficient time with the Kuna nor devoted effort to examining the rich anthropological literature about them (Howe, 2012, p. 50).

AGRICULTURE

In agriculture, fields are in permanent cultivation, and cultivators often using plows, draft animals, and techniques of soil and water control. Plows are more efficient at loosening the soil than are digging sticks or hoes, and turning the soil brings nutrients to the surface. Plowing requires a much more thorough clearing of the land, but, when combined with a system to increase land fertility, it allows land to be used year after year.

Irrigation is also frequently important in agriculture. Although some horticulturalists practice simple methods of water conservation and control, agriculture in dry areas can be carried out only with sophisticated irrigation techniques. In hilly areas, agriculture requires some form of terracing to prevent crops and good soil from being washed down the hillside. Preindustrial agriculture also uses techniques of natural fertilization, selective breeding of livestock and crops, and crop rotation, all of which increase productivity. Whereas horticulturalists must increase the amount of land under cultivation to support a larger population, agriculture can support population increases by more intensive use of the same piece of land.

Intensive cultivation generally supports higher population densities than horticulture. In Indonesia, for example, the island of Java, with 9% of the nation's land area, supports more than two thirds of the Indonesian population through intensive rice cultivation using elaborate irrigation terraces. The Javanese population density of well over 3,000 people per square mile contrasts sharply with the maximum population density of swidden areas in Indonesia, which is about 145 people per square mile.

The greater productivity of agriculture also results from more intensive use of labor. Farmers must work long and hard to make the land productive. For example, growing rice in an irrigated paddy requires about 233 person-days of labor per year for each hectare (a hectare is about 2.5 acres; Barker et al., 1985, p. 128). In addition to human labor, agriculture requires more capital investment than horticulture.

Plows must be bought and draft animals raised and cared for. Frequently, access to land is controlled and must be purchased. Although agriculturalists may have more control over food production than horticulturalists, they are more vulnerable to the environment. When people depend on the intensive cultivation of one or two crops, one crop failure or a disease that strikes draft animals may become an economic disaster.

Agriculture is generally associated with sedentary villages, the rise of cities and states, occupational diversity, social stratification, and other complex forms of social organization. However, in premodern agricultural societies, most of the population worked the land for food, fiber, fuel, and other resources. In the Middle Ages in England, about 85% of the population worked the land (Bovery, 2015). In the United States in 1790, 90% of the population of four million (excluding Native Americans but including enslaved people) lived on farms (USDA, 2018).

In contrast to horticulturalists, who grow food primarily for the subsistence of their households, most agriculturalists produce for their own family but are also integrated into large, complex state societies. Many work land that they do not own and must pay rent or provide services to landowners. Often, they are referred to as **peasants**, though there are many different definitions of this term.

Agriculturalists often use markets to trade a portion of their food production for goods they need or desire. Additional portions of their production are taken from them through rents and taxes. The food agriculturalists produce supports non-food-producing occupational specialists, such as religious and political elites, trade and craft people, and a variety of other professionals.

Musha: A Peasant Agricultural Village in Egypt

Musha is an agricultural village about 250 miles south of Cairo in the flood plain of the Nile (Hopkins, 1987). Egypt is a desert country, and Musha receives almost no rainfall. Summer days are hot, with temperatures in the 90s and 100s. In the winter, temperatures remain above freezing. Agriculture is dependent on irrigation and on the flooding of the Nile. Historically, the Nile flooded Egypt between June and October every year. Since 1970, the flooding has been controlled by the Aswan High Dam.

Musha's farmers practice a 2-year crop rotation system based on both summer and winter crops. The cycle begins with cotton in the first summer, followed by wheat in the first winter. Maize or sorghum follows in the second summer, or the land may be left fallow. The cycle is completed in the second winter with millet, lentils, and chickpeas. Farmers also grow grapes and pomegranates and raise a variety of vegetables for home consumption. They also depend on milk, cheese, and butter from water buffalo, cows, sheep, and goats. A portion of the production must be used to pay taxes (currently about 14% of the value of the land) or for rent if farmers do not own all the land they plant. Far more must be used to acquire other things the household needs.

The household is central in Musha cultivation, with extra laborers hired as needed. Women do not work in the fields but keep house, care for animals, and make cheese. Children, who often both work for their own families and are hired by others, cut clover for animals and help harvest cotton. The head of the household plays a key managerial role in supervising others, making agricultural purchases, hiring labor, and managing the household budget.

Historically, Musha farmers relied on either animal power or human effort and a few basic wooden tools. Shallow plows and threshing sleds were pulled by oxen. Winnowing relied on the wind and a winnowing fork and on sieves for the final cleaning. Donkeys and camels were also used to haul crops, people, and equipment.

Starting in the 1950s, Musha farmers began to move toward mechanized agriculture. In the 1960s, when the completion of the Aswan High Dam brought an end to the annual flooding of the Nile, the government constructed feed canals, and these became the main source of water for the fields. The new system made double cropping and cotton cultivation possible but also increased land values, led to the creation of large land holdings, and increased demand for labor. By 1980, almost all farmers used machines at least some of the time. They also came to depend on chemical fertilizers and pesticides as well as animal manure.

The government maintains the canals, but farmers must raise the water from the canals to the level of the fields. Pumps that perform this task are generally owned by several people, who share the work of guarding and maintaining them. Other tasks include keeping the ditches that bring the water from the canals to the fields repaired, arranging for the distribution of water to the farmers’ fields, and keeping accounts.

Each farmer provides the necessary labor to open a break in the ditch band so that the water will flow into their field. After arranging for the distribution of water to their fields, the farmer must hire a driver and tractor to plow the fields if they, like many small farmers, do not own one. Fertilizer and seed are hauled from the village bank to the farmer’s home and from their home to the field (Hopkins, 1987).

Wheat is one of the most important crops in Musha. It is planted in November and harvested in May and June. Hired laborers usually harvest wheat using small sickles. The reaped wheat is bundled into sheaves, which are transported by camel or wagon to the threshing ground, where the wheat is fed into a threshing machine. The threshed grain is winnowed and sifted by specialists who are paid piece rates. Finally, the grain and straw are hauled from the threshing ground back to the farmers’ storerooms (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 In a rural area of Egypt, a boy holds a handful of newly harvested wheat .

MOHAMED EL-SHAHED/AFP via Getty Images

For thousands of years, Musha’s farmers have been incorporated into state-level societies. Ancient Egypt was divided into territories called “nomes,” a system that began more than 4,000 years ago. Musha is near ancient Lycopolis (modern-day Asyut), the capital of the 13th nome of Upper Egypt. Farmers living near current-day Musha were thus incorporated into the ancient Egyptian empires, the Greek and Roman empires that followed them, the Byzantine Empire, a succession of Muslim Caliphates and dynasties, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, and the modern Egyptian state. Thus, in deciding on their strategies for making a living, Musha farmers have always had to adapt both to the physical environment and to the policies of the various governments that controlled them and their lands. Musha’s farmers today are enmeshed in the global economy. However, it is important to remember that this was also true 2,000 years ago when the grain produced there fed the citizens of the Roman Empire.

For much of the 20th century, the Egyptian government controlled prices for key crops such as wheat and cotton. However, direct government intervention was greatly reduced or eliminated in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite this, the government is still heavily involved in agriculture and has remodeled the very landscape on which the farmer works. Government organizations make loans to farmers, distribute agricultural inputs such as seed and fertilizer, subsidize the production of some agricultural products, and buy part of the farmers' crops. State policies, such as importing wheat from the United States, affect the prices farmers receive. The state sets land ownership policy and makes rules governing land tenancy. It affects the labor market through policies that encourage or discourage migration. Although many of these policies are recent, some, such as the fact that the state sets land ownership policy, have been basic to life in Musha since ancient times.

Profits from farming are uncertain, and most families have several sources of income. Sales of animals, fruits and vegetables, and handicrafts supplement household income. In fact, 70% of village households derive their major income from activities other than farming; these activities include day labor, government jobs, craft trades, and specialist agricultural work. Remittances from family members who have migrated or payments from rents and pensions also may play a role.

Farmers today must know the skills of farming as well as how to manage a wide range of other activities. They must interact with family members and government officials and negotiate with the owners of tractors, day laborers, the owners of tractors, and many others. They supervise agricultural work and manage a wide range of activities, making important decisions at every step. Farmers are affected by global prices for the commodities they produce as well as the policies of their own national government and foreign governments. All over the world, farmers are increasingly part of a globalized, industrialized economy.

INDUSTRIALISM

In **industrialism**, the focus of production moves away from food to other goods and services. Investments in machinery and technologies of information and communication become increasingly important. In foraging, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture, most of the population is involved in producing food. Although the food industry is very large in industrial societies, only a very small percentage of the population is directly involved in food production, which is increasingly automated. In the United States, in the early 1900s, more than one third of families lived on farms (Lobao & Meyer, 2001). In 1935, when the U.S. population was about 127 million, there were 6.8 million farms. In 2019, the U.S. population was more than 327 million but there were 2.04 million farms. Fewer than one half of 1% of the population listed farming as a primary occupation. Of the 2.04 million U.S. farms, almost half a million had less than $1,000 in yearly sales and 1.13 million had sales less than $10,000, making their owners almost entirely dependent on income from nonfarming occupations. There are only about 79,000 farms with sales of $1 million or more. These account for less than 4% of all farms but almost 60% of the total value of agricultural production in the United States (USDA, 2021a, 2021b).

Industrialism has an explosive effect on many aspects of economy, society, and culture. It has led to vastly increased population growth, expanded consumption of resources (especially energy), increased occupational specialization, and a shift from working for subsistence and selling the products of one’s labor to selling the labor itself for hourly or yearly wages. In every industrialized society, most people work for wages that they use to purchase food, goods, and services. Although cash transactions are found in other production systems, almost all transactions in industrial economies involve money.

Industrial economies are based on the principles that consumption must constantly expand, and material standards of living must always rise. This contrasts with economies previously discussed, which put various limits on both production and consumption and thus make lighter demands on their environments. Industrialism today has vastly outgrown national boundaries. The result has been a great movement of resources, capital, and labor, as the whole world has gradually been drawn into the global economy.

Contemporary industrial and postindustrial societies are characterized by well-coordinated specialized labor forces that produce goods and services and by much smaller elite and managerial classes that oversee the day-to-day operations of the workplace and control what is produced and how it is distributed. Increasingly, mobility, specific skills, and education are required for success.

Because industrialized societies generate much higher levels of inequality than societies based on foraging, pastoralism, or horticulture, and because industrial systems require continued expansion, wealth and poverty become critical social issues. Unequal distributions of opportunity, economic failure, illness, and misfortune limit the life chances of vast numbers of people in industrialized societies. Conversely, economic success creates lifestyles well above poverty for large numbers and conditions of truly extraordinary wealth for a very small number.

Inequalities characterize relations among as well as within nations. The creation of complex global systems of exchange between those who supply raw materials and those who use them in manufacturing, as well as between manufacturers and consumers, has resulted in disparities of wealth around the world.

Globalized industry has had an enormous impact on the environment. In the past, production systems have put strains on local environments, altering them and leading to the extinction of both animal and plant species. For example, Melinda Zeder (2008) has examined how domestication and agriculture changed the environment of the Mediterranean. However, industrialism changes the entire planet. Increased emissions of carbon dioxide and many other gasses, resulting from the burning of fossil fuels, have raised global temperatures by about 2 degrees Fahrenheit. According to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report released in early 2021, the previous 7 years have been the warmest since 1880, with 2020 tying with 2016 as the hottest on record (Brown, 2021). July 2021 was the warmest single month ever recorded (NOAA, 2021). It is almost certain that by the time you read these words, the planet will have grown even hotter. Left unchecked, global warming resulting from industrialism will have dramatic effects on human lifestyles within the next 50 years.

Industrial Agriculture in California

As we noted, although there are a bit over 2 million farms and ranches in the United States, most of the food produced in the country comes from 4% of these with sales of over 1 million dollars a year. These farms are essentially outdoor factories for food production. Most are family owned. However, the physical work of farming is done by hired laborers. In California, 73% of the total agricultural labor force is composed of immigrants, and about 80% of crop workers identify as Latinx. Half of all crop workers are undocumented; that is, they are not U.S. citizens, and they do not have legal authorization to live here. An additional 20% are not U.S. citizens but have legal residency.

Although they provide half of the labor for U.S. farms, the undocumented receive very few public services. Even things as basic as police protection can lead to imprisonment and deportation. This makes them very exploitable: If they complain about their working conditions, their employers may have them arrested. Those with legal residency fare somewhat better. However, they too are vulnerable since even minor legal infractions can lead to their deportation.

It is illegal to hire undocumented workers. However, immigration agents rarely inspect the farms. Even if they do, farm owners shield themselves from prosecution for hiring undocumented workers by using subcontractors called *mayordomos*. *Mayordomos*, often former workers themselves, contract to do work on a field for a fixed price. They then hire and pay the workers.

Over a third of vegetables and two thirds of the fruit and nuts that are produced in the United States come from California. Much of this production comes from California’s Central Valley, an area of about 20,000 square miles between the Sierra Nevada to the east and the Coast Range to the west. Fresno County, in the middle of the Central Valley, is one of the most productive agricultural counties in the United States. The valley lies at about sea level. It is flat, and in summer, it is usually extremely hot. For example, in Fresno in August 2019, the high temperature was above 90 every day and 100 or higher on 18 days. On 5 days, it was 105 or higher.

In *They Leave Their Kidneys in the Fields* (2016), anthropologist Sarah Bronwen Horton describes how cantaloupes are harvested near Dos Palos, California. Harvesting cantaloupes is centered around field-packing machines. These are large platforms that extend over four or five rows of melons. Workers following the packing machine check the cantaloupes for ripeness. If the melons are ripe, they cut the cantaloupes from the vines and toss them onto the packing machine. Workers on the packing machine put the cantaloupes in boxes, grading them for size and labeling them as they go. They put the boxes on conveyor belts, which transfer them to the trailer. At the trailer, workers stack the boxes on pallets (Figure 5.11). Later, the pallets of melons will be taken to cooling, storage, and shipping facilities. But the boxes of melons that you see in your local grocery store are created by workers in the fields.

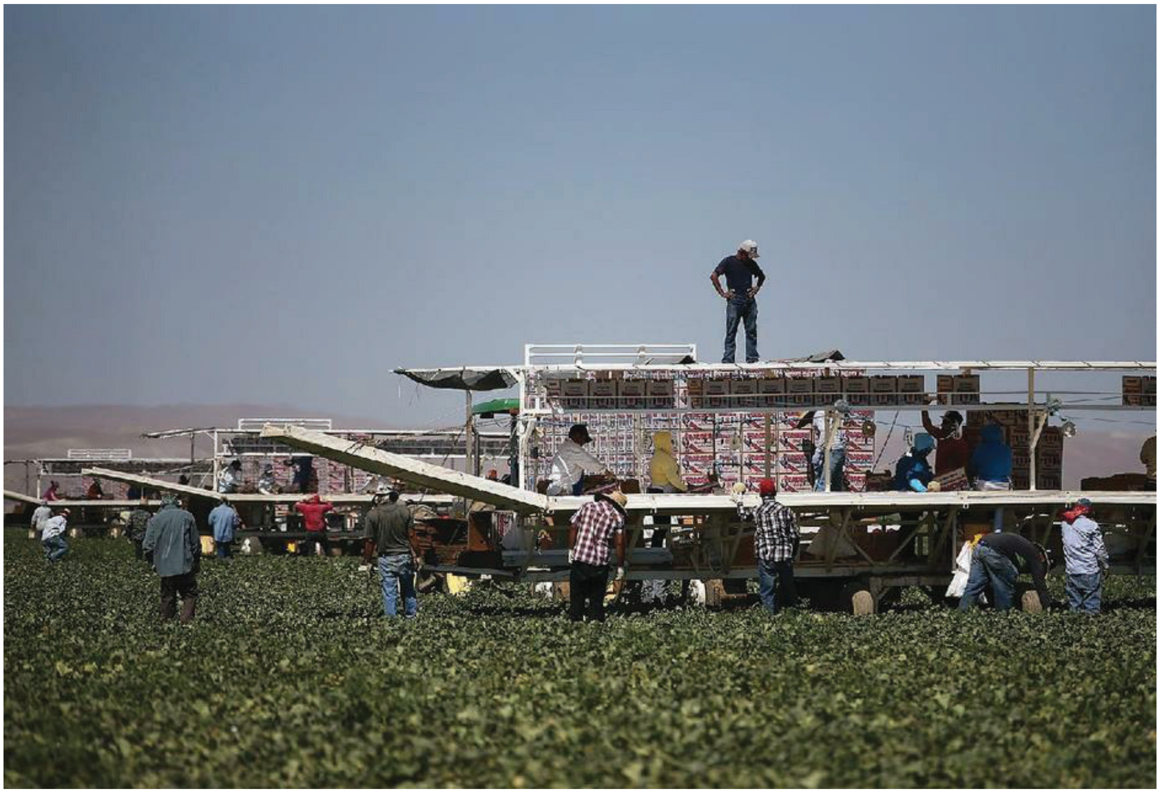


Figure 5.11 Workers operate field-packing machines near Firebaugh, California, during the cantaloupe harvest.

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Harvesting melons and other agricultural jobs in California’s Central Valley is extremely hard work. Those on the packing machine have shade, but the workers harvesting the melons and those moving the filled boxes to pallets on the truck work in the full sun. Stacking boxes on the trucks is particularly difficult since the sun reflects from the metal floor. The pace of the work is set by the packing machine and trailer, which are pulled through the field at a steady rate by a tractor. Workers must be able to keep up. Harvesters, packers, and stackers must all move at the rate of the machine.

Because of the extreme heat, work starts well before sunrise and ends in the early afternoon. Despite this precaution, heat-related deaths are a regular occurrence. These could be avoided if workers were allowed adequate shade and water. And California has laws that, in theory, should provide these. However, Horton reports that such laws are of little practical use. The basic conditions of labor in the field—that *mayordomos* are paid by the job, that taking water or bathroom breaks requires stopping the packing machines, and that stopping for an individual penalizes everyone on the team—mean that workers very rarely have adequate water or shade. Also, regulations designed to prevent workers from contaminating the melons forbid them from carrying their own water. The workers' plight is further exacerbated by their own beliefs about masculinity and by the fact that if they show any health needs at all, they may have difficulty finding jobs in the future.

Relatively few workers actually collapse and die in the fields. However, the effect of the work on their long-term health is profound. Hard physical labor under conditions of high heat and inadequate water place enormous stress on the body. Dehydration results in damage to the kidneys, which slowly lose their ability to process bodily wastes. End-stage renal disease (ESRD) is diagnosed when kidney capacity is 10% to 15% of normal. People with ESRD cannot survive without dialysis or transplant. Because of the harsh working conditions, California's Central Valley has some of the highest rates of ESRD in the United States (Bragg-Gresham et al., 2020).

ESRD and other diseases are further exacerbated by poverty and stress. Agricultural work is seasonal, and most crop workers have annual incomes at or below the poverty level. For citizens and legal residents, unemployment benefits and Social Security help families survive. However, these are not available to the undocumented. The average life expectancy in the United States is almost 80 years. Given the difficulties of their lives, it may not be surprising to learn that crop workers in the United States have a life expectancy of 49 years, and many are disabled far younger (Horton, 2016, p. 159).

The Global Marketplace

The contemporary world is characterized by connectedness and change of a magnitude greater than anything seen in earlier times. For some people, the expansion of the global economy has meant new and more satisfying means of making a living. However, these opportunities are not equally available to all peoples or to all individuals within a culture. For many, the promise of prosperity offered by the global economy has yet to be fulfilled.

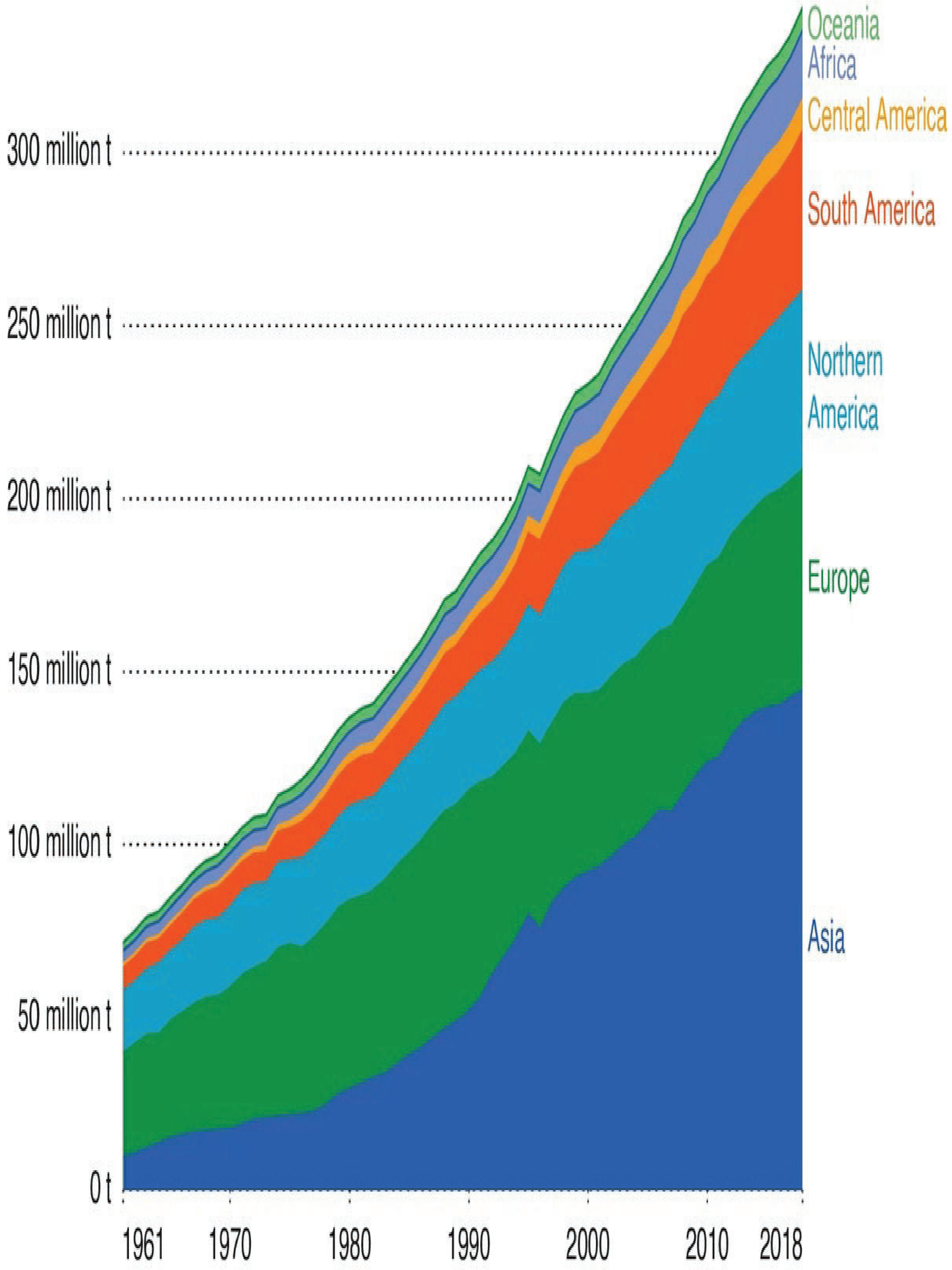
Anthropology is particularly sensitive to the complex linkages among local, regional, national, and global contexts that structure the modern world. Anthropologists today can play an important role in shaping government and global economic policies that take into account the environmental impact of different ways of making a living, the values and practices of local cultures, international plant and animal conservation efforts, and corporate- and state-driven efforts to participate in global markets. In the postindustrial globalized society, individuals, governments, and businesses must find new ways to adapt to significant changes in the production and distribution of goods. We explore some of these changes in Chapter 6 on economics.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD CHOICES

There is overwhelming scientific consensus that greenhouse gasses generated by human activity are the major cause of global warming. According to an analysis of over 1,500 studies, current world agricultural production generates about the equivalent 13.7 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide and makes up about 26% of all greenhouse gas created by human activity (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Thus, finding a solution to global warming will almost certainly affect the ways we produce our food.

Agriculture's biggest contribution to global warming comes from the global livestock industry, which produces 7.1 billion metric tons of CO_2 equivalent each year. Sixty-five percent of this comes from cattle production for both beef and milk (FAO, 2019). Lamb, cheese, and pork produce less CO_2 than the beef industry, and poultry still less, but all these make substantial contributions to greenhouse gasses.

The numbers are particularly worrisome because, as people become wealthier and more urban, global demand for beef and dairy products is steadily rising (Figure 5.12). For example, between 1961 and 2013, the average person in China went from eating about 8 pounds of meat a year to eating about 125 pounds of meat a year. At the same time, the Chinese population doubled, from about 660 million to over 1.3 billion (Economist, 2019). Meat consumption is rising fast in other Asian nations as well as in Africa. However, people in the United States eat much more meat than those in most other places: about 222 pounds of red meat and poultry each year (Jones, et al., 2018). In India, people eat very little meat but consume a lot of dairy products. Milk production has gone from 55.6 million tons in 1991 to 176.3 million tons in 2018 (Economic Times, 2019).


Oceania
Africa
Central America
South America
Northern America
Europe
Asia
300 million t
250 million t
200 million t
150 million t
100 million t
50 million t
0 t
1961
1970
1980
1990
2000
2010
2018

Description

Figure 5.12 Meat production and consumption has risen steadily since the early 1960s. The rise has been particularly large in Asia.

Source: Ritchie, Hannah, and Max Roser. 2017. “Meat and Dairy Production.” Our World in Data, August. https://ourworldindata.org/meat-production. Global meat production, 1961 to 2018.

Many fish have a smaller carbon footprint than livestock. However, there is a great deal of variability. Farmed catfish produce almost as much CO_2 as beef cattle. Tilapia and shrimp farming also produce a lot of greenhouse gases. However, small fish such as anchovy and sardines, as well as farmed shellfish such as oysters, mussels, and scallops, are relatively energy efficient and do not produce much greenhouse gas. The electricity used to power fish farms is the source of much of the CO_2 produced by harvesting these smaller varieties. Thus, as alternative, nonpolluting ways of producing electricity are found, fish farming can become less environmentally hazardous (Hilborn et al., 2018).

Although some plant-based foods, like almonds, do have high resource requirements, vegan and vegetarian diets result in far less greenhouse gas emissions than diets that rely more heavily on meat and fish. Consuming a pound of nuts, broccoli, or tofu involves only about 7% as much greenhouse gas emission as a pound of beef (Hamerschlag & Kumar, 2011, p. 23). A study by Aleksandrowicz and others (2016) showed that vegan diets resulted in about 45% less greenhouse gas than typical U.S. diets, and vegetarian diets, 31% less. But even just replacing beef and lamb with pork and poultry results in a 21% decline in greenhouse gas emissions.

There is certainly a place for meat in a healthy diet, and in some places, meat production is environmentally sound. Neither of the authors of this book is a vegetarian. However, it is clear that some changes in our diets and changes to how we produce food are necessary if we are going to be able to control global warming.

You Decide

1. What are the cultural patterns and values that underlie food choices in the United States, and how do they affect what you eat?
2. Do you believe that individual food choices can affect large patterns such as global warming?
3. Given that, in poor countries, increased meat consumption has been linked to greatly improved health, should poor countries encourage it?

SUMMARY

1. What is the relationship between the environment and the subsistence (food-getting) pattern of a society? All societies must adapt to their physical environments, which present different problems, opportunities, and limitations to human populations. The subsistence pattern of a society develops in response to seasonal variations in the environment and environmental variations over the long run, such as drought, flood, animal diseases, climate, demographic changes, and the presence of other groups.
2. When did plant and animal domestication first occur? Plant and animal domestication began 11,000 to 10,000 years ago in Africa, Asia, and Europe.
3. What are the five major subsistence strategies of human populations? The five major patterns of using the environment to support human populations are foraging (gathering, fishing, hunting), pastoralism, horticulture, agriculture, and industrialism. However, there is much diversity within each pattern.
4. What is foraging? Give an example of a foraging society and explain how foraging has been affected by climate change. In

foraging, people rely on food, most often plants, naturally available in the environment. Climate change threatens foragers' livelihoods, particularly in the Arctic. The Hadza are a foraging society in East Africa.

5. What is pastoralism? Give an example of a pastoralist society and describe the difference between transhumant and nomadic pastoralism. Pastoralism is subsistence based primarily on the care of domesticated herd animals. Transhumant pastoralism combines permanent villages with a yearly rotation of different locations for the animals. Nomadic pastoralism sees whole populations move with the animals, and there are no permanent villages. The Maasai are an example of transhumant pastoralism.
6. What is horticulture? Give an example of a horticultural society. Horticulture typically is a tropical forest adaptation based on planting gardens or small fields. It uses simple technology and often requires the cutting and burning of wooded land to clear fields for cultivation. Fields are used for several years and then lie fallow for a longer time. The Lua' are swidden cultivators in Thailand.
7. How have anthropologists helped improve nutrition and health in many places? Anthropologists have helped develop new foods and growing techniques that have helped reduce hunger. Nevin Scrimshaw and Mary Goodrich were the founders of the International Nutrition Foundation.
8. What is agriculture, and how is it related to larger societies and states? Agriculture is the use of large areas that are permanently cultivated. It involves more complex technology than horticulture, often including plows and irrigation. Agriculture generally supports high population densities and is associated with sedentary village life. Agricultural societies are stratified, and farmers constitute only one element of them. Governments often intervene in agriculture. Musha, an Egyptian village, is an example of peasant agriculture.
9. What is industrialism, and how is it related to wealth and the environment? In industrialism, machines and chemical processes are used to produce goods. Food production constitutes only a small percentage of total production and occupies little of the

population. Industrialism creates great material prosperity for many people, but at a cost of high levels of inequality and environmental destruction. Melon production in California is an example of industrial food production.

10. How are food choices related to global warming? Agriculture is responsible for about a quarter of all greenhouse gas production. Livestock, particularly cattle and other ruminants, are especially destructive. Solving the problem of global warming will involve making difficult food choices.

Key Terms

agriculture (p. 125)

foraging (hunting and gathering) (p. 124)

horticulture (p. 125)

industrialism (p. 141)

nomadic pastoralism (p. 131)

pastoralism (p. 124)

peasants (p. 139)

subsistence strategies (p. 120)

swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivation (p. 135)

transhumant pastoralism (p. 131)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

Back to Figure

The years are labeled 1984, 1992, 2000, 2008, and 2016 horizontally and the thickness of ice in million square kilometers vertically marked 4.0, 5.0, 6.0, and 7.0. The graph depicts a value of 7 million square kilometers before 1984, goes on decreasing, 6.5 in 1984, 7 in 1992, declined to 5.9 in 2000, 4.2 in 2008, and near 4.3 in 2016. It declined further down to 5 after 2016.

Back to Figure

The years are labeled 1961, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2018 horizontally and production in million tonnes from 0 to 300 in intervals of 50 vertically. The regions are labeled Oceania, Africa, Central America, South America, Northern America, Europe, and Asia from top to bottom on the right. All places show rise in the production and consumption. In 2018, the values reached above 300 for Oceania, Africa, and Central America. It crossed 250 for South America, crossed 200 for Northern America, crossed 150 for Europe, and crossed 50 for Asia. The rise has been particularly large in Asia.

6 ECONOMICS

Markets play an important role in many societies. In large-scale industrial and postindustrial societies, they are the primary way that people exchange goods. Here, women sell food and seasonings at a market near the Great Mosque of Djenne in Mali, West Africa.

iStockphoto.com/oversnap

Learning Objectives

After you have read this chapter, you will be able to:

6.1 Define economics, describe economizing behavior, and give examples of situations when people use economizing behavior and when they do not.

6.2 Summarize how people in foraging, pastoral, horticultural, and agricultural societies generally allocate resources.

6.3 Explain different ways of organizing labor.

6.4 Differentiate between reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange, with examples of each.

6.5 Summarize the key characteristics of capitalism.

6.6 Discuss the rising cost of higher education.

All human societies have economic systems within which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed. In one sense, the economic aspect of culture is simply the sum of the choices people make regarding this area of their lives. Such choices have important ramifications. For example, choosing to become a farmer rather than an insurance broker may determine where you live, who you are likely to meet, and the sorts of behaviors you will expect in your spouse and offspring. However, such choices are not unlimited; they are constrained by our cultures, traditions, and technologies. Furthermore, our environments set the boundaries within which choices about the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services are made.

Every society must have an economic system in the sense that each group of people must produce, distribute, and consume. Economics deals partly with things—with the tools used to produce goods and the goods themselves. More important, it deals with the relationship of things to people and people to one another in the process of producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services.

Anthropologists are interested in understanding the relationship between the economy and the rest of culture. One aspect of this relationship is that culture defines or shapes the goals sought by individuals and the means of achieving those goals. Society and economy are interdependent in other ways. How production is organized has consequences for the institution of the family and the political system. For example, in southern Mali, where most people live by agriculture and where land is abundant, children can help farm when they are very young. Thus, families tend to have as many children as they possibly can. Large families can cultivate more land and therefore are generally wealthier than small families. Their leaders acquire political power and social prestige from wealth and from having many supporters.

Although economists often attempt to do so, it is difficult to separate the economic system from the rest of culture. Economics is embedded in the total social process and cultural pattern. In nonindustrial and kin-based societies, for example, few groups are organized solely for production; their economic activities are only one aspect of what they do. Production is carried out by groups such as families, larger kinship groups, or local communities. The distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods are thus embedded in relationships that have social and political purposes as well as economic ones.

ECONOMIC BEHAVIOR

We define economics as the study of how the choices people make as individuals and as members of societies combine to determine the way their society uses its scarce resources to produce and distribute goods and services. The academic discipline of economics developed in a Western market economy, and there has been much debate within anthropology over its applicability to other cultures (Isaac, 1993).

The idea of scarcity is a fundamental assumption of Western microeconomic theory. Economists assume that human wants are unlimited but the means for achieving them are not. If this is correct, organizations and individuals must make decisions about the best way to apply their limited means to meet their unlimited desires. Economists assume that individuals and organizations will make such choices in the way they believe will provide them with the greatest benefit. Economists call such choices **economizing behavior**.

Economists have sometimes equated benefit with material well-being and profit. Will a business firm cut down or expand its production? Will it purchase a new machine or hire more laborers? Where will it locate its plant? Will it manufacture shoes or gloves? How much will be spent on advertising its product? Such decisions are assumed to be motivated by an analysis designed to produce the greatest cash profit and are assumed to be rational—that is, based on the desire to maximize profit (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 The Charging Bull statue by the Sicilian artist Arturo Di Modica is a popular tourist attraction in New York City. Located near the stock exchange, it symbolizes

financial optimism and people’s hope for profitable investments.

iStockphoto.com/AndreyKrav

However, the notion of financial profit does not completely explain economic behavior. Consider a choice you may make this evening. After you finish reading this chapter, you may well be confronted with a series of decisions: Should you reread it for better comprehension? Should you study for another course? Call and get a pizza delivered? Play with your kids? Socialize with your friends? Take care of that project for work? Get some sleep? Watch TV? Of course, there are many other possibilities.

You will make your choice based on some calculation of benefit, but that benefit is not necessarily reducible to financial profit. You can believe that you would ultimately make more money if you study and got higher grades. However, your choice is set in a context in which money is unlikely to be the most important element of value; we value our friends, our children, our leisure time, and many other things as well. If you choose to socialize instead of hitting the books, your choice is rational because it is based on some calculation of your needs and goals, although not necessarily on those that lead to greater profit. If we were to predict your behavior on the assumption that you are always motivated primarily by financial rewards and will always act to increase your material well-being, our predictions would often be wrong. We would do better by asking what motivates you.

Just as you might value an evening spent with friends over getting an “A” in this class, members of other cultures might value family connections, cultural tradition, social prestige, leisure time, or other things over monetary profit. People everywhere make rational choices based on their needs and their guesses about the future, but culture, values, and institutions provide the framework within which these choices are made. For example, Western culture is dominated by capitalism, and we place an extremely high value on wealth and material prosperity. We are constantly bombarded by advertisements, examples, and stories that emphasize the link between happiness and consumption. Thus, it seems natural for us to think that many of our goals are best achieved through earning money and using this to make purchases through the marketplace.

On the other hand, some societies appear to be in business mainly for their health. For example, in the last chapter, we discussed the Hadza. Until recently, they lived in an area of Tanzania with an abundance of plants they can gather and animals they can hunt. They had considerable leisure time but did not attempt to use it to increase their wealth. Though they knew how to farm, they didn’t because, they said, it would require too much work. Thus, they valued their leisure time (and the socializing they use it for) over what they could produce farming. As we saw, the Hadza didn’t change their lifestyle because they decided farming or working was better but because changes in their environment and other groups encroaching on their land made it almost impossible to support themselves by foraging (Gibbons, 2018).

Leisure time is only one of the ends toward which people expend effort. They may also direct their energies toward increasing social status or respect. In Western society, prestige is often tied to increased consumption and display of goods and services. This is not universal, however. In many societies, prestige is associated with giving away goods. Conspicuous consumers and stingy people become objects of scorn and may be shunned or accused of witchcraft (for examples, see Danfulani, 1999; Offiong, 1983). The notion that prestige can be gained through giving is also well established in our society. Universities have buildings bearing the names of their most generous donors, and Bill Gates is not only the chair of Microsoft, he is also the head of the world’s largest charitable foundation. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had almost $50 billion in assets at the end of 2020 and in 2020 gave away almost $6 billion (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, n.d.).

To understand the economies of various cultures, anthropologists face two related problems. First, they must analyze the broad institutional and social contexts within which people make decisions. Second, they must determine and evaluate the factors that motivate individual decision-making.

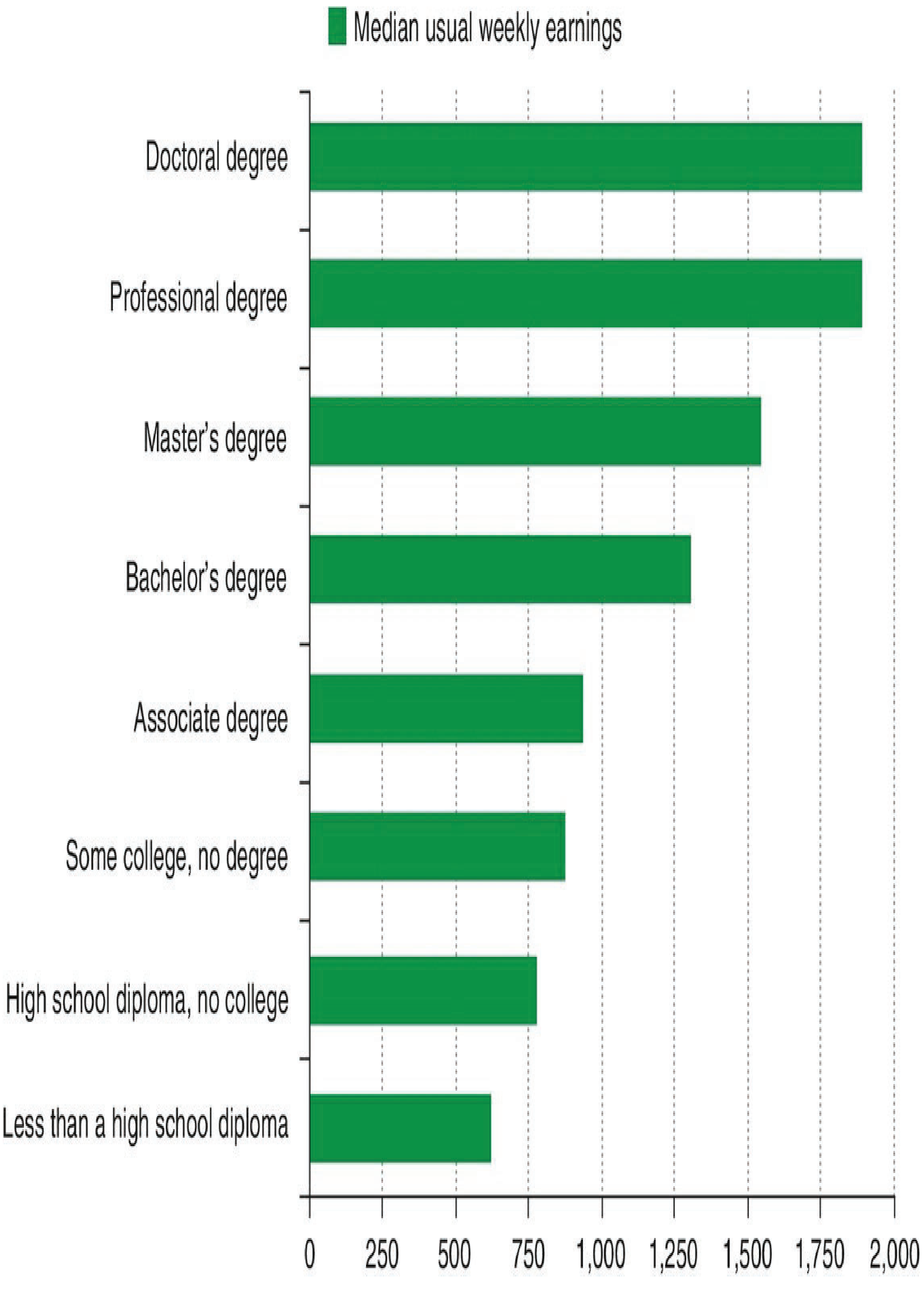
One way we can think about any economic system is to consider a series of fundamental issues that all societies must face. Because members of all societies must acquire the food and other materials necessary to their lives, all must engage in production. To do so, all societies must acquire resources such as land and water, and all must have some system through which the rights to use such resources are allocated.

However, resources in and of themselves do nothing. Rather, people must be organized in specific ways to use resources in the production of goods and services. Thus, each society has a **division of labor**: a pattern by which different tasks are given to different members of society. For example, foragers rely on the plants and animals in their environment, but they never gather these randomly; specific groups of people do specific tasks. Most often, men hunt and women gather. Thus, they are organized to produce. They never simply eat whatever they catch and collect; they distribute plant and animal foods in different ways. Who eats what depends on factors such as family membership, gender, age, and participation in production. Thus, they organize distribution and consumption in specific ways as well. In the remainder of this chapter, we will explore how different societies tackle the problems of allocating resources, organizing labor, and distributing and consuming the results of production.

ALLOCATING RESOURCES

Productive resources are the things that members of a society need to participate in the economy. How people access these is basic to every culture. People everywhere require access to land and water. Access to the knowledge that allows one to make and use tools plays an important role in all societies. Other important forms of knowledge can be controlled as well, such as the knowledge of healing or religious rituals.

The critical role played by access to education in American society is shown by the strong relationship between university degrees and income. Universities are not the only place to get knowledge. However, it is clear that possession of a university degree and, hopefully, the knowledge this implies has a direct impact on an individual’s economic role in society and certainly on their earnings. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022a; Figure 6.2), the median weekly income for high school graduates in 2021 was just $809. The median for those with a bachelor’s degree was almost twice that at $1,334, and those with a doctoral degree earned a median income of $1,909 a week—almost 2.5 times the income of those with only a high school diploma. Further, in 2020, the unemployment rate among people with a high school diploma but no college was 6.2%, while those with a bachelor’s degree had about 3.5% unemployment and those with a doctorate only 1.5% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022a).



Median usual weekly earnings
Doctoral degree
Professional degree
Master's degree
Bachelor's degree
Associate degree
Some college, no degree
High school diploma, no college
Less than a high school diploma
0
250
500
750
1,000
1,250
1,500
1,750
2,000

Description

Figure 6.2 The direct relationship between education, employment, and earnings in the United States.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

An important point of contrast between economic systems is the extent to which individuals and groups have access to productive resources. In general, differential access to resources develops as population size and social complexity increase. In some societies, most people have access to the resources necessary to survive and fully participate in society. In others, access to these resources may be exclusively or disproportionately invested in specific social groups. Again, examining access to knowledge in the United States is instructive. Only 3% of the students at the most selective universities in the country come from households in the lowest 25% of the income scale, whereas 72% of students at these schools come from the wealthiest 25% of American families (Giancola & Kahlenberg, 2016). The Ivy League includes some of the most prestigious universities in the United States. At five of the eight Ivy League schools, there are more students from the wealthiest 1% of U.S. families than from the poorest 60% (Aisch et al., 2017). This clearly shows that family wealth plays a critical role in determining access to knowledge (and to social networks), and access to knowledge plays a critical role in future wealth and social position.

Small-scale economies have a limited number of productive resources, and almost everyone has access to them. Large-scale societies have a great many more resources, but access to them is limited. This can be seen by comparing access to resources among foragers, pastoralists, horticulturalists, and agriculturalists.

Foragers

In foraging societies, people do not consciously raise the productivity of their land, relying instead upon the animal, plant, and insect foods naturally occurring in the environment (Figure 6.3). Among foragers, productive resources include weapons used in hunting animals and tools used in gathering plants as well as the knowledge to make and use these items. The technology is simple, and most tools are made by hand, though foragers often trade for goods such as metal axes. People take great care to ensure that they have access to the tools necessary for their survival. Among the Hadza of Tanzania, men spend much time gambling. However, a man’s bow, bird arrows, and leather bag are never shared or gambled because these items are essential to survival (Woodburn, 1998).

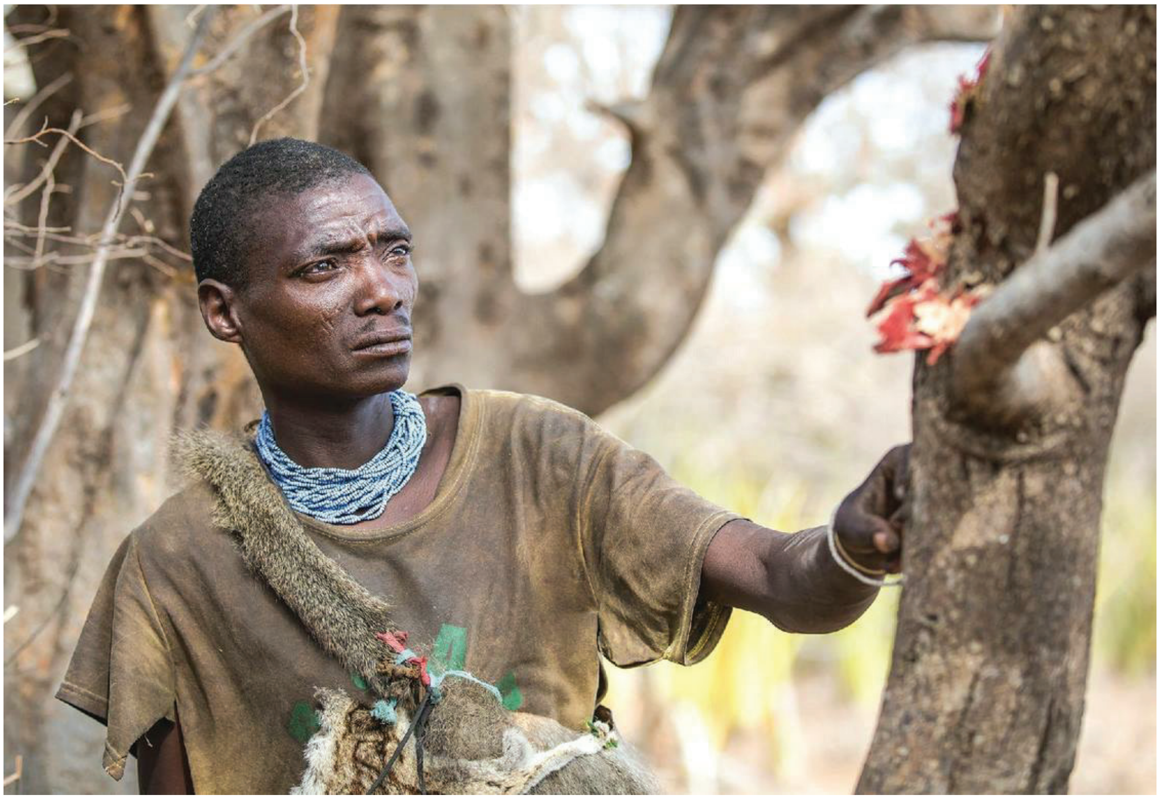


Figure 6.3 In foraging societies, people do not consciously raise the productivity of their land, relying instead upon the animal, plant, and insect foods naturally occurring in the environment. Here, a Hadza man collects honey from a beehive in a tree.

iStockphoto.com/Katiekk2

Besides knowledge and tools, land and water are the most critical resources for foragers, and many forms of land tenure are found in these societies. The requirements of a foraging lifestyle usually mean that a group of people must spread out over a large area. Foraging grounds are not exclusively owned because flexible boundaries have an adaptive value: Ranges can be adjusted as the availability of resources changes.

The abundance and predictability of resources also affect territorial boundaries. Boundaries tend not to be defended where large areas are needed to support the population. Foraging groups are relatively small, and defending a large territory is very difficult. Where resources are more abundant and people move less, groups may be more inclined to defend their territory and more capable of doing so (Cashdan, 1989, p. 42). However, claiming exclusive ownership is expensive and risky. Ownership claims must be defended. When resources were limited, foraging groups sometimes developed resource-sharing arrangements with potentially competing groups (Kim, 2006).

The Ju/’hoansi of the Kalahari were typical foragers. Although today most Ju/’hoansi are settled, in earlier times, their camps were located near water holes, and the area a local group used was measured by one day’s round-trip walk, which was about 12 miles. Each camp had a core area best conceived of as a circle with a water hole at the center and a radius of about 6 miles. Points beyond this were rarely used. Although camps were moved five or six times a year, they were not moved far. Sometimes they were shifted only a few hundred yards; the farthest move was about 10 or 12 miles (Brown et al., 2007; R. Lee, 1968). Ju/’hoansi territories were associated with longstanding residents who were spoken of as owners. Although they did not have exclusive rights to the land, their permission had to be asked when others wished to use the land’s resources. Such permission was rarely refused, although visitors might be made to feel unwelcome (Cashdan, 1989, p. 41).

Hunters and gatherers require freedom of movement not only as a condition of success in their search for food but also as a way of dealing with social conflict. Hunting bands are kept small to exploit the environment successfully. In such small groups, conflict must be kept to a minimum. When arguments break out, individuals can move to other groups without fear that they are cutting themselves off from access to vital resources. If land was individually or even communally defended against outsiders, the freedom of movement in hunting societies would be severely limited.

Pastoralists

Among pastoralists, the most critical resources are livestock and land. Access to grassland and water is gained through membership in kin groups. Within pastoralist camps, all members share equal access to pastures. It is this right of access, rather than ownership, that is important.

Animals require a substantial investment in labor. They must be tended to and fed. In some cases, corrals or other structures must be built to house them. When they are ill, they must be cared for. If they are neglected, they do not often survive. Thus, individual families own animals.

In pastoralist societies, animals are kept as wealth. The prosperity and status of a family are linked to the number of animals they own, and people are very reluctant to kill and eat their animals, often doing so only as part of religious celebrations. Instead, pastoralists live off animal products such as milk and blood. These products as well as the animals themselves may be traded for grain or other goods.

In most places, pastoral tribes are migratory, moving from pasture to pasture as rain, drought, heat, and cold dictate. Such migrations often traverse the lands of agricultural people. In these cases, access to pasturage and migration routes is determined through negotiation with local authorities. Contemporary pastoralists often establish access to land by contracts with the landowners of villages through which they move. These contracts, which usually must be renewed every year, specify the rent for the pasture, the borders of the area, and the date by which the area must be vacated. However, pastoralism and agriculture are very different lifestyles, and conflict between pastoralists and sedentary villagers is common.

The yak-herding Drokba of northwestern Tibet (Figure 6.4) presents an interesting historical example of pastoralism. The Drokba were under the control of large Buddhist monasteries that owned all the grassland in the area. Families were granted rights to use pastures in return for tax payments. Allocation of pastureland was reviewed every third year and altered to fit family herd size and composition. The system worked well because the land could be managed to provide sufficient land for each family (Barfield, 1993, p. 188).

Figure 6.4 In most cases, pastoralists use the milk or blood of their animals, only rarely killing them for meat. Here a Tibetan herder milks a yak in northern India.

iStockphoto.com/Zzvet

Horticulturalists

In addition to land, tools, and knowledge, horticulturalists often require storage facilities. In such societies, land tends to be communally owned by an extended kin group, although the right to use a piece of land may be given to a household or even an individual. For example, among the Ibo, swidden farmers in Nigeria, no individual owns land or has permanent rights to it. Instead, land is vested in kinship groups and allocated to individuals by leaders of these groups (Acheson, 1989). But even the group that has the right to use the land may not dispose of it at will; land is “inalienable” and may not be sold. With this type of land ownership, few people are deprived of access to basic resources because almost every person belongs to a landholding group.

Where population densities are low or large areas of land are available for cultivation, rights to land use are very loosely held. For example, among the Machiguenga of Peru, a group with extensive lands, there is little sense of exclusive territory (A. Johnson, 1989, p. 58). But when specific geographical conditions limit the amount of land available or when population pressures increase, land shortages do occur. The Enga in the Papua New Guinea Highlands is a horticulture group that often lacks sufficient land (Figure 6.5). They frequently attempt to deal with this problem by using violence to drive smaller, weaker groups off their land and annexing it (A. Johnson, 1989, p. 62).

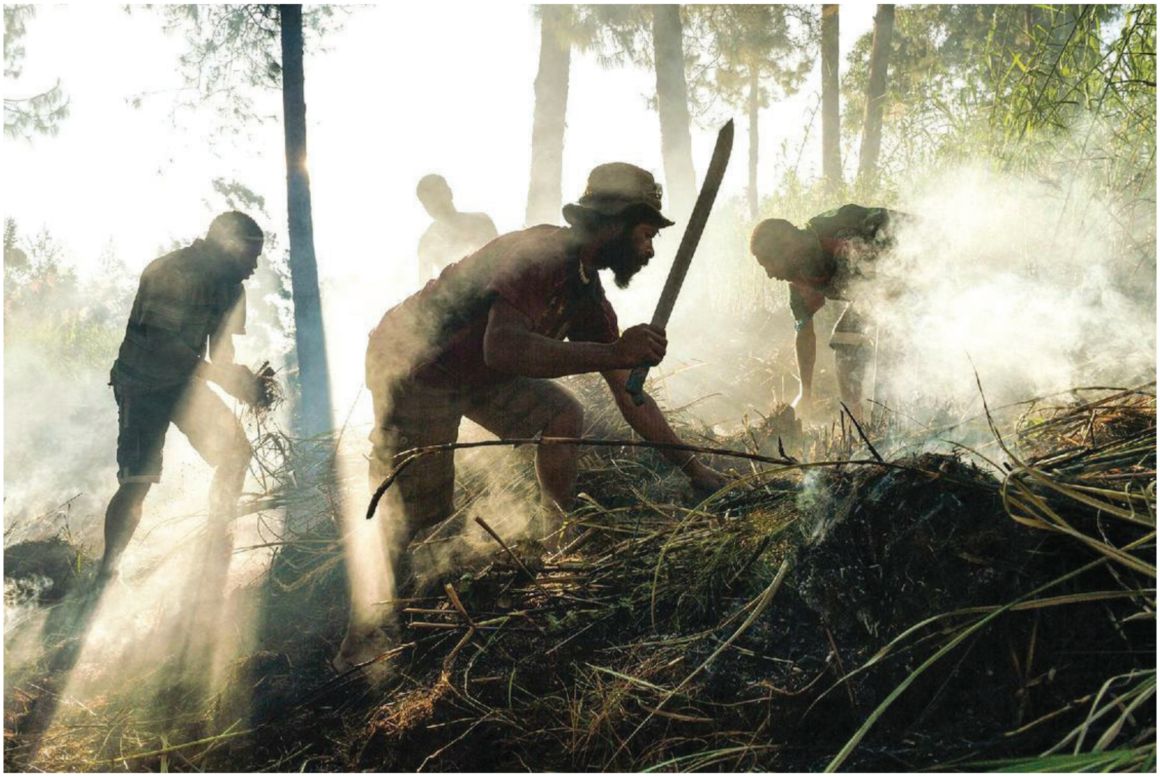


Figure 6.5 Members of the Enga ethnic group clear land for a garden in Papua New Guinea.

Hemis/Alamy Stock Photo

In societies based on horticulture, the work involved in clearing, cultivating, and maintaining the land is a large investment. The rights to the products of such land are vested in those who work it, most often the domestic group or household. Because the user of the land may die while the land is still productive, some system of inheritance of use rights is usually provided for. Among the Lacandon Maya in the highlands of Chiapas in Mexico, for example, individuals may farm any unused piece of land. However, clearing virgin land is very difficult, so individuals retain rights to the land they have cleared and are likely to reuse, even if it is not currently in production. People who migrate from the area may lose rights to their land, but their families retain ownership of any fruit trees that have been planted on it. Should a man die after investing time and labor in clearing and planting land, his wife and children retain rights to use the land (McGee, 1990).

Agriculturalists

In societies with high population densities, agriculture comes to dominate production. In these places, productive resources take many forms, often including complex tools and the technological knowledge required to make them. Ownership of these critical resources may be limited to a small group whose members thereby gain power over others and control their labor.

In some societies, productive resources are continually reinvested to generate profit for their owners beyond their subsistence needs. Such resources are referred to as **capital**. Although the use of capital occurs in many different sorts of societies (Berdan, 1989), it becomes the principal form of economic organization in capitalist societies (discussed later in this chapter).

Under conditions of intensive cultivation, the material and labor investment in land becomes substantial. People often undertake enormous work to bring land into cultivation, including the construction of farming terraces and rice paddies (Figure 6.6). However, large quantities of food are generated. This food supports not only those who work the land but substantial nonagricultural populations as well. In many cases, cities and towns develop. Under these circumstances, land becomes a valuable (and limited) resource, and private ownership or control of the land becomes common.

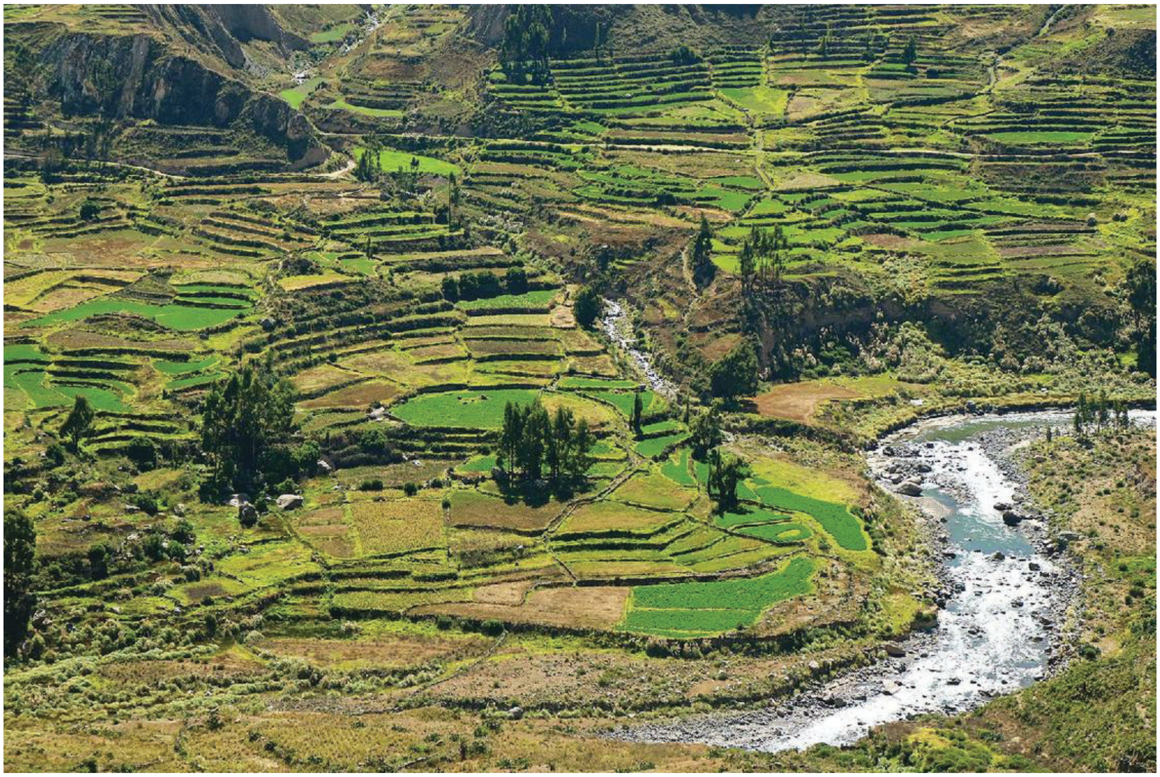


Figure 6.6 In agricultural societies, land ownership becomes an important source of wealth and power. Enormous amounts of labor are often invested in land. Imagine the time and effort required to create these agricultural terraces in Colca Canyon, Peru. Many terraces in this area are more than 1,500 years old (Treacy, 1987).

iStockphoto.com/lovelypeace

Individual land ownership may grow out of population pressures that produce land scarcity and lead to intensified methods of agriculture. Under these conditions, communal control of land creates conflict as people begin to grumble about not receiving their fair share. Those who have improved the land are unwilling to see the investment of their labor revert to a kin-based pool. This may be particularly true in the case of cash crops such as coffee, which require long-term care and yield harvests over many years. Individuals thus become tied to specific plots of land.

Private ownership of rigidly defined fields does not necessarily mean that landowners work their fields. Instead, fields are usually rented to laborers whose efforts support both themselves and the landowners. For example, a study of rural households in India showed that almost 80% owned less than 1 hectare (about 2.2 acres), an area insufficient to support themselves. Ten percent were landless and had to rent land from large landowners or work for others to survive (Hanstad et al., 2008). Under such systemic conditions, a peasantry emerges. Peasants are family-based agriculturalists who are integrated into large state-level societies (see Chapter 5). Part of their production is taken by a ruling class in the form of rents and taxes. In some cases, peasants may hold land by Compare th right: An individual or family has the right to use a piece of land and may pass this right to descendants but cannot sell or trade the land. However, in most places, the peasants’ access to land is contingent on payment of rents, and they can be dispossessed if they fail to pay rent or if the landowner finds a more profitable use for their land.

In societies where land is worked by those who do not own it, landowners enjoy high standards of living based on rents and services they receive from the peasants. Landowners use the rents received to command the services of craft workers, servants, and sometimes armed forces. Agriculture, therefore, tends to be associated with a political organization characterized by a ruling landowning class and with occupational specialization.

Most current-day societies rely on agriculture, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, only a minuscule percentage of the population in contemporary societies is involved in farming. Therefore, access to productive land is not important for most people. In wealthy nations, most people earn their livelihood by working for wages for businesses and other organizations that provide goods and services. These are usually organized as capitalist enterprises.

ORGANIZING LABOR

In small-scale preindustrial and peasant economies, the household or some extended kin group is the basic unit of production and consumption (B. White, 1980). A **household** is an economic unit—a group of people united by kinship or other links who share a residence and organize production, consumption, and distribution of goods among themselves. A household is different from a family because it may include lodgers, apprentices, servants, and others who are not counted as family members.

Households and kin groups do seek financial gain, but this is not their primary purpose. Their goals are often social or religious rather than monetary. Labor is not a commodity bought and sold in the market; rather, it is an important aspect of membership in a social group. The labor that people both perform and receive situates them relative to others in their family and gives them a sense of identity and meaning.

The gendered division of labor is a good example of the relationship between work and identity. At some level, the sexual division of labor is biological because only women can bear and nurse children. Thus, caring for infants is almost always primarily a female role and is usually central to women’s identity (see Alamin et al., 2020). Beyond this, few jobs are universally identified as men’s or women’s work. However, in almost all societies, people believe that some sorts of work are proper only for men and others proper only for women. These jobs are important elements of male or female identity. For example, for the Navajo, weaving is both a sacred activity and a model for womanhood. In Navajo religious belief, Spider Woman wove the universe itself (Berlo, 1993, pp. 37–38). On the other hand, in most West African societies, weaving is considered a male task, part of male identity (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). A survey of 48 societies in which people milked animals showed that in 15 of them, milking was exclusively men’s work, and in 21, it was exclusively women’s work. In the remaining 12, the work was shared among men and women (Murdock & Provost, 1973, p. 207).

Figures 6.7 Societies typically have a gendered division of labor: Some jobs are considered appropriate only for men, others only for women. However, which tasks are associated with which gender vary. Among the Navajo, weaving is a task for women. Here, a grandmother teaches weaving to her granddaughter.

iStockphoto.com/grandriver

Figures 6.8 In much of West Africa, weaving is a task for men. Here, a young man works a loom in the Tanji region of Gambia.

iStockphoto.com/Salvador-Aznar

In Western society, work also has very important social implications. People work to put food on their table and a roof over their heads. But, as anthropologist Pamela Crespin (2005) has noted, an individual's self-image and social status in our society are bound up with work. Joblessness or the inability to earn a living wage diminishes an adult's identity and status (2005, p. 20). This is a particularly important issue in a nation such as the United States, where unemployment is a perennial problem. Economists often consider "full employment" to be an unemployment rate somewhere between 4% and 5%. They worry that unemployment rates lower than that will result in high inflation ("What Full Employment," 2017). Although that worry may be justified, it leaves up to 1 in 20 unemployed. In April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. unemployment rate rose to 14.8%, the highest recorded since modern recordkeeping began in the late 1940s. By November 2021, it had declined to 14.2%, still well above the 3.5% recorded in early 2020 before the pandemic (Falk et al., 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022b).

Economic organization by household contrasts with organization by firm. A **firm** is an institution composed of kin and/or nonkin that is organized primarily for financial gain. Individuals are usually tied to firms through the sale of their labor for wages. Labor is thus a commodity, bought and sold on the market. A firm does not produce goods for the use of its members; the items it produces are sold for profit.

In economies where households are the units of production, there can be little economic growth. Households cannot easily expand or contract as the economy fluctuates. They cannot easily fire their members or acquire new ones. Large-scale production and distribution systems tend not to develop under such conditions. Firms, on the other hand, are geared toward economic growth. Their goal is to find the mix of capital and labor that will most increase the firm’s financial value to its owners. This usually means that firms wish to increase their size indefinitely.

Households and firms are not mutually exclusive. Firms, even very large ones, may be controlled by a single family. Further, firms often use the vocabulary of family and team to promote their goals. As Casey (1999, p. 156) noted, many firms—from supermarket chains to hospitals and airlines—promote themselves as communities, inviting employees and customers to “come join our family.” Thus, economic relationships between employers and employees or firms and customers are partially disguised by ideas about social relationships within a family or household.

Specialization in Agricultural and Industrial Societies

Among foragers and most horticulturalists, all adult men and women are actively engaged in the quest for food. Technologies are simple and do not require skills beyond those that can be learned through informal socialization. The few specialists (for example, religious practitioners) are usually also engaged in food and tool production. The characteristic division of labor is not by job but by age and sex.

The division of labor in society becomes more specialized as the population increases and agricultural production intensifies. This is particularly the case when a society is dependent on grain agriculture. Grains are hard, durable, and storable. Landlords and rulers who can control them have access to wealth and power in new and important ways. They can use grains as a form of payment or use them as a form of coercion by denying them to people. The ability to provide food for people leads to occupational specialization, and as this spreads through society, individuals are increasingly able to exchange their services or the products they produce for food and wealth. Specialists are likely to include soldiers, government officials, and members of the priesthood as well as artisans, craftsmen, and merchants.

Traditional areas of contemporary India provide an excellent example of occupational specialization. There, only people belonging to specific hereditary kinship groups can perform certain services or produce certain kinds of goods. Literally thousands of specialized activities—washing clothes, drumming at festivals, presiding over religious ceremonies, making pots, painting pictures—are traditionally performed by specific, named hereditary groups called castes (see Chapter 11; Figure 6.9).

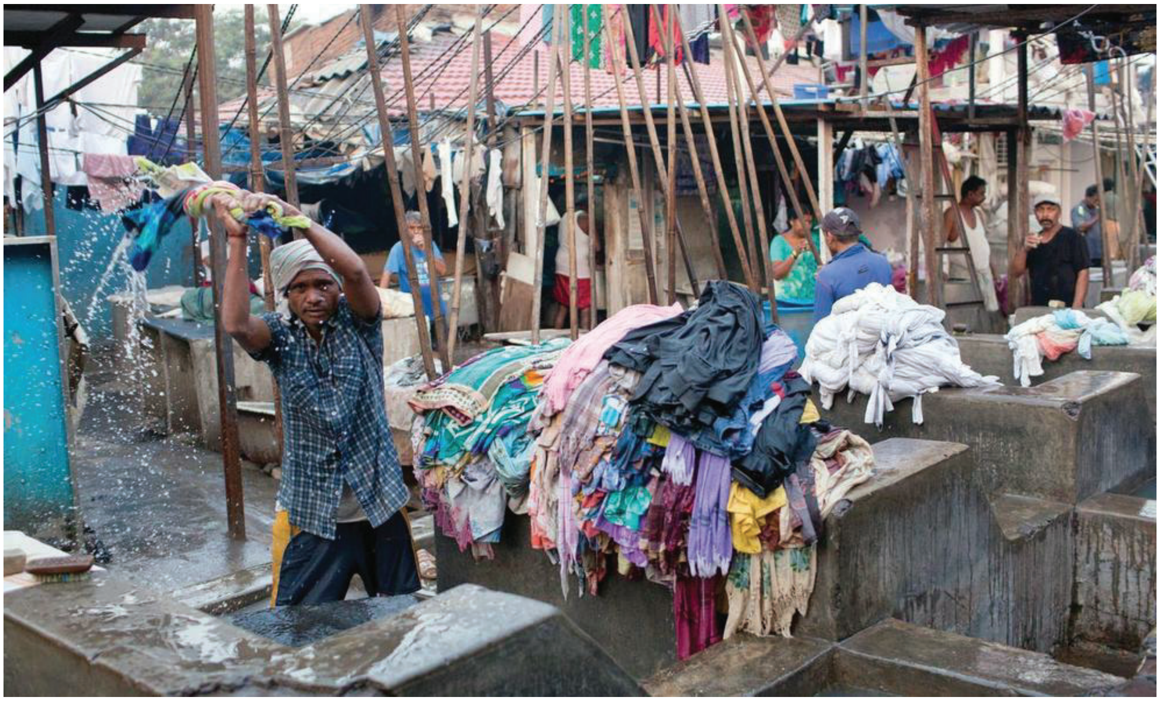


Figure 6.9 Historically, Indian society has been organized into hierarchically ranked hereditary groups that have specific occupations. Here, a Dhobi, a member of the clothes-washing hereditary group, cleans laundry in Mumbai.

iStockphoto.com/Zzvet

Almost all of the world's population today lives in industrial or postindustrial societies, and almost everyone is a specialist of one kind or another. In the United States, the Department of Labor recognizes 867 numbered occupational categories, but this greatly condenses the variety of occupations. For example, category 19-3000 is for Social Scientists and Related Workers. It is divided into numerous subcategories. Category 19-3090 is Miscellaneous Social Scientists and Related Workers. It includes 19-3091, Anthropologists and Archaeologists; 19-3092, Geographers; 19-3093, Historians; 19-3094, Political Scientists; and 19-3099, Social Scientists and Related Workers, All Other (Office of Management and Budget, 2018)[4].

Industrialism and the high degree of specialization it requires have produced unprecedented material wealth. There is no doubt that more people today have greater access to a wider variety of goods and services than ever before in the history of humanity. However, specialization can also take a large physical and emotional toll. Since the beginning of the Industrial Age, many factory jobs have involved repetitious and mind-numbing labor often performed under hazardous conditions. In the American automobile plants of the early 20th century, for example, almost all skilled tasks were mechanized. Workers simply inserted pieces into machines, turned a switch, and waited until the machines completed their tasks. The machinery determined the pace of work and the tasks performed (Figure 6.10). In the 1920s, one worker summed it up simply by saying, “The machine is my boss” (in S. Meyer, 2004).

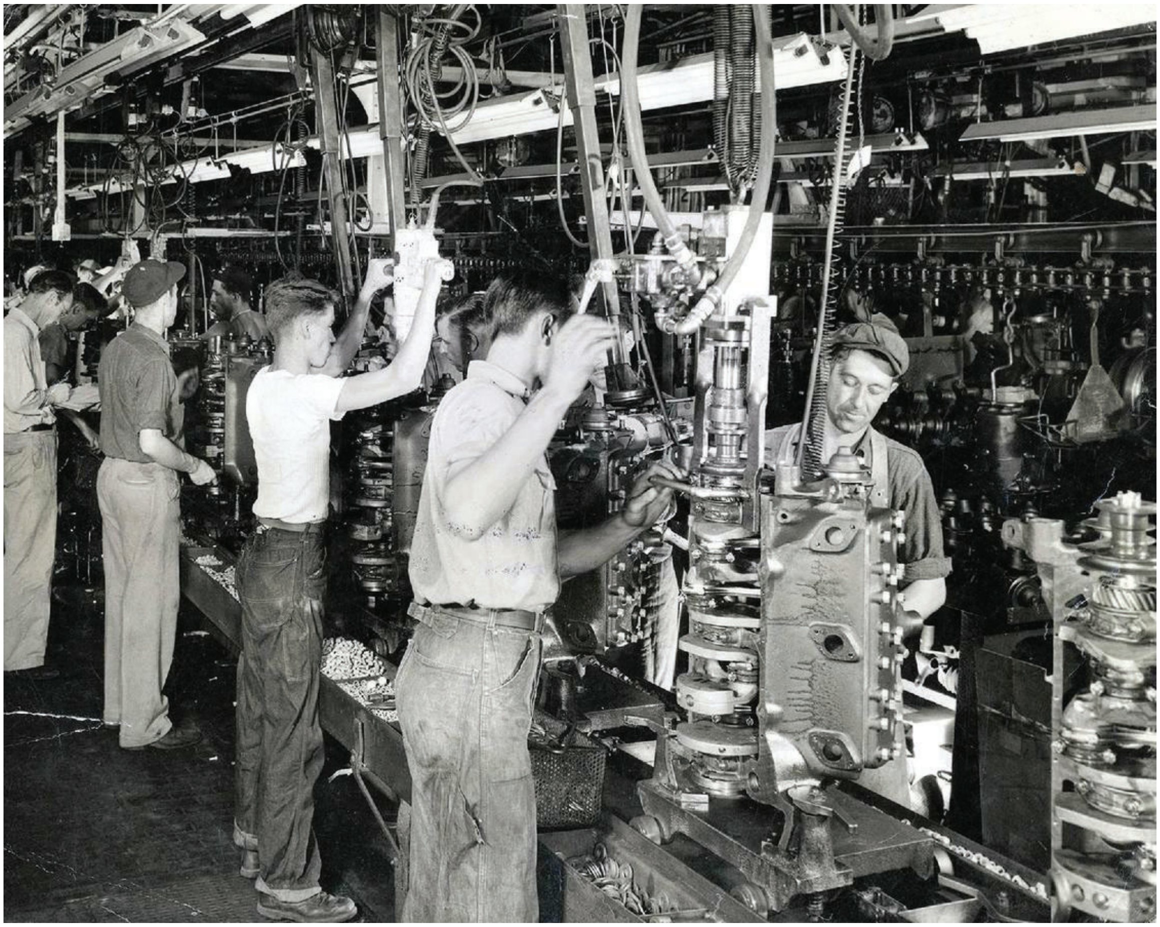


Figure 6.10 In the American automobile plants of the

early 20th century, almost all skilled tasks were mechanized. Workers inserted pieces into machines, turned a switch, and waited until the machines completed their tasks. Here, men work an assembly line at a Ford Factory in the early 20th century.

Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images

Factory labor often led to new notions of identity. For example, in the 19th century, many U.S. workers associated masculinity with skilled labor, independence, and decision-making. On the assembly lines in the early 20th-century United States, labor was boring and monotonous, and workers had little decision-making ability. Through public speeches, company policies, and employment practices, companies such as Ford Motors sought to redefine masculinity, associating it with “working hard—in the company of other men, on a useful product and being paid well for it” rather than skill and independence (Lewchuk, 1993, p. 852).

Ethnography

Food, Culture, History, and Economics in Belize

ATLANTIC OCEAN
Gulf of Mexico
Belmopan
Caribbean Sea
PACIFIC OCEAN

As we have seen throughout this chapter, economics concerns the choices people make in production, distribution, and consumption. These choices are set within systems of production such as foraging or capitalism and within systems of exchange such as reciprocity or the market. However, they are also set within the critical contexts of culture and history. Richard Wilk’s book on the history of food production and consumption in Belize, *Home Cooking in the Global Village*, gives us insight into the complex ways in which economics, national culture, international patterns of trade, and individual identity are linked together.

Wilk points out that although we often think of globalization as a feature of recent world history, it is a very old force in many places. Europeans first visited the area that today is Belize, on the eastern coast of Central America, in the early 16th century but did not establish firm permanent settlements there until the late 17th century. Since that time, Belize has been deeply immersed in the global economy, exporting raw goods, importing food and manufactures, and, more recently, cultivating international tourism.

The early settlers of Belize were buccaneers—sailors and privateers who stole, traded, and occasionally grew food as well. Often known as Baymen, their habitual diet had been formed by years of living on ship rations, which consisted of processed and preserved bread and meat. As they settled, they continued to prize preserved European products and European styles of dining even though local foods were easily available.

The Baymen found an important source of income in logwood, a thorny bush that is used to make purple and black dyes. This was highly prized in the European cloth industry, and trading it gave them money to buy European foods. Meat, long associated with wealth and power in Europe, was also an important and prestigious element of their diet, and Baymen hunted and ate everything from manatees to armadillos and parrots. The Baymen borrowed few foods or culinary traditions from indigenous people. Even in a new and different environment, ideas of proper eating were tied to Europe and international trade.

In the 18th century, the economy of Belize shifted from dependence on logwood to the cutting and export of mahogany. This required large amounts of labor and enslaved Africans were often used to perform it. Many slaves were fed with imported rations, as were other workers throughout the Americas. Such rations consisted of some sort of preserved meat, wheat flour, and beans or other legumes, washed down with alcohol or stimulants such as coffee or tea. Wilk reported that such rations were “the first global diet, a kind of nineteenth-century equivalent of McDonald’s hamburgers” (2006, p. 63). A huge network of suppliers in Europe and the Americas grew to provide, package, and transport these foods. Because the diet was deeply unhealthy, it also created a constant demand for patent medicines, and Wilk noted that everywhere extractive industries went, “the ground is still littered with patent medicine bottles” (2006, p. 64).

England effectively controlled Belize after the Battle of St. George’s Caye in 1798, but the area did not formally become the colony of British Honduras until 1862. Despite the outlawing of slavery, there was little change in the overall patterns of production under colonial rule. However, patterns of consumption altered to fit a colonial model. In that system, people gained respectability through close emulation or even exaggeration of the lifestyle of the home country. In practice, this translated to the consumption of foods and other products manufactured in Europe and North America as well as other social practices. Although the colonial administration sometimes tried to promote food self-sufficiency, it was frustrated both by the fact that exporting mahogany was much more profitable than producing food and by the symbolic importance of the consumption of European products for all elements of the Belizean population. Because being both “modern” and “civilized” were linked to European styles of consumption, imports increased steadily, and food accounted for 60% of all imports by value (Wilk, 2006, p. 91). However, although Belizeans prized imported food, they also consumed many locally produced foods as well, and a local cuisine did develop (Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11 A street-side restaurant in Belmopan, Belize.

iStockphoto.com/Roijoy

Moves toward Belizean nationalism and independence began as early as the 1930s, and ideas about imported and locally produced food were important from the start. They presented a contradiction, however: On the one hand, the idea of a national cuisine was important to the newly independent nation, and nationalist leaders such as George Price urged Belizeans to consume local foods. On the other hand, being an independent nation was closely tied to Belizeans' ideas about wealth and progress. Belizeans viewed local foods as signs of poverty, so they believed consuming them was moving away from the values of nationalism. The result was that food imports continued to increase, as did the consumption of international-style foods produced locally. However, Belizeans also began to take pride in their local cuisine. In 1985, Queen Elizabeth visited Belize and, at a state banquet, was served gibnut, a large rodent that is a local delicacy. The queen did not comment, but the British tabloid press claimed that Belizeans were savages who had served rat to the monarch. This led to an outburst of local pride as well as charges of racism against the British. Today, gibnut is often and proudly served in Belizean restaurants as “royal rat.”

The last two decades of Belize's international food history have been characterized by two contradictory trends. First, Belizeans have migrated in large numbers to the United States and created communities here. Members of these communities have opened restaurants serving Belizean food and, in some cases, have returned to Belize to open restaurants there as well. This process has made Belizeans more aware that they do have an indigenous cuisine and also helped legitimize that cuisine for them. Essentially, they have now imported their own cuisine! Second, the Belizean economy has come to depend increasingly on tourism. This has led to the construction of resorts and restaurants that cater to the tastes of foreign visitors from wealthy nations. Although the food served in these places is often billed as “local,” it is, for the most part, generic international cuisine that imports both ingredients and cooking styles from other places.

This survey of Belizean cuisine shows us that economy is deeply entangled both with history and with cultural ideas about what is good to eat and the social-status values of different sorts of consumption. Belize is not a nation that has been drawn into the global economy. Rather, it is a nation whose entire existence has been intertwined with the global economy. Production in Belize has long depended on the types of goods and services demanded and valued by people in Europe and North America—for example, logwood in the 17th century and beautiful sites for scuba diving and relaxation today. The styles of consumption that developed depended on Belizean connections to these distant places, from the British connections of colonial society to the greater realization of Belizean ethnic identity in diaspora communities in the United States.

Questions

1. Describe how Belize’s economy has been connected with the economies of Europe and North America.
2. How important do you think it is for places to have a local cuisine?
3. In the Belizean case, local cuisine has, in a sense, been created by globalization. Can you think of other cases where this is true?

DISTRIBUTION: SYSTEMS OF EXCHANGE AND CONSUMPTION

In all societies, goods and services are exchanged. In fact, some anthropologists have long held that the exchange of goods is one of the fundamental bases of culture. In the early 20th century, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1990/1924) theorized that societies were held together by patterns of giving and receiving. He pointed out that because gifts invariably must be repaid, we are obligated to each other through exchange.

There are three main patterns of exchange: reciprocity, redistribution, and the market. Although more than one kind of exchange system exists in most societies, each system is predominantly associated with a certain kind of political and social organization (Polyani, 1944).

The mutual give-and-take of goods and services among people of similar status is known as **reciprocity**. Three types of reciprocity can be distinguished from one another by the degree of social distance between the exchanging partners (Sahlins, 1972).

Generalized Reciprocity

Generalized reciprocity is a pattern in which people give goods and services to one another but keep no account of what is given and do not expect any specific return. Generalized reciprocity is usually carried out among close kin. Ideally, such transactions are done without any thought of economic or other self-interest. In Western society, we are familiar with generalized reciprocity as it exists between parents and children. Parents constantly give things and provide services to their children out of love or a sense of responsibility (Figure 6.12). What would we think of a parent who kept an account of what a child costs and then expected the child to repay this amount? What parents usually expect is some gratitude, love, respect, and the child's happiness.

Figure 6.12 People practice generalized reciprocity by giving and receiving without keeping a strict accounting or expecting a specific return. Gift giving among family members usually follows this pattern.

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Generalized reciprocity involving food is an important social mechanism among foraging peoples. For example, Hadza children learn to share very early, and they share with both kin and nonkin. At the ages of 7 and 8, they begin to share even more. Boys and girls both share equally (Crittenden & Zes, 2015).

In most foraging societies, hunters distribute meat among their kin groups and camp. Each person or family gets either an equal share or a share dependent on its relationship to the hunter. Robert Dentan described an instance of generalized reciprocity among the Semai of Malaysia:

> After several days of fruitless hunting, an East Semai man kills a large pig. He lugs it back through the moist heat to his settlement. Everyone gathers around. Two other men meticulously divide the pig into portions sufficient to feed two adults each (children are not supposed to eat pork). As nearly as possible, each portion contains exactly the same amount of meat, fat, liver, and innards as every other portion. The adult men take the leaf-wrapped portions home to redistribute them among the members of the house group. (1979, p. 48)

Similar systems are used by the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari and the Inuit. A North American might wonder: What does the hunter get out of it? Aren't some people always in the position of providing and others always receiving? Part of the answer is simply practical: Some of the animals hunted are very large, and a single family would be unable to consume or preserve the meat before it rotted. However, hunters have several other motivations for sharing. Hunters gain satisfaction from accomplishing a highly skilled and difficult task (Woodburn, 1998), and there are other rewards as well. Although not all people in foraging societies give and receive equally, all are obligated to both give and receive. Gifted hunters may give more than they receive, but the gifts they do receive may be critical for their survival. Hunters may also gain status from food distribution. For example, among the Pacaa Nova, a horticultural group in Brazil, distributing meat gives a man prestige and an opportunity to display the culture's most valued trait, generosity, while simultaneously building his credit for future reciprocity (von Graeve, 1989, p. 66). In our society, although parents may give freely to children, we all know that most have strong expectations for their children's future behavior as well. It may well be that no one ever truly gives without any consideration of what the return might be.

Balanced Reciprocity

Balanced reciprocity involves a clear obligation to return, within a specified time limit, goods of nearly equal value to those given. Partners in balanced reciprocity hope to gain access to valued goods and services while at the same time strengthening social relationships between giver and receiver.

A gift that is accepted obligates the recipient to make a return gift. A refusal to receive or a failure to reciprocate a gift indicates a withdrawal from a social relationship. Sometimes a return gift may be given immediately. In some marriages, friendship compacts, and peace agreements, people may give one another the same types and quantities of goods (Sahlins, 1972, p. 194). For example, 100 yams may be exchanged for 100 yams. More often, the payoff is not immediate. Sometimes an attempt to reciprocate the gift immediately is an indication of unwillingness to be obligated and shows that a trusting social relationship is neither present nor desired (Mauss, 1924/1990).

In the United States, we participate in balanced reciprocity when we give gifts at weddings or birthdays, exchange invitations, or buy a round of drinks for friends. The economic aspect of these exchanges is repressed; we say it is the spirit of the gift and the social relationship between the givers that is important. However, we also know that the individual who fails to return gifts or who returns gifts that are disproportionally large or small is unlikely to remain our friend for very long.

Although balanced reciprocity is found in almost all societies, it is typical of trading relations among nonindustrialized peoples without market economies. Such trade is frequently carried out over long distances and between different tribes or villages. It is often done between trading partners: men or women who have a longstanding and personalized relationship with one another. Trading partners know each other’s personalities, histories, and other aspects of their social lives. Plattner (1989a) has noted that the greater the risk of economic loss, betrayal of confidence, or unfair dealing, the more important such personalized relations are.

The Kula Trade

Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1984/1922) analysis of the kula trade is one of the most famous anthropological studies of reciprocal trading. The **kula trade** is an extensive system of intertribal trade among a ring of islands east of New Guinea (today part of the nation of Papua New Guinea). Among these are the Trobriand Islands, where Malinowski did his fieldwork.

Although many kinds of goods are traded, Malinowski focused his study on two goods: *soulava* and *mwali*. *Soulava* are long necklaces of red shell that are always traded in a clockwise direction. *Mwali* are bracelets of white shell and are always traded counterclockwise. Thus, individual *soulava* and *mwali* travel around the circle of islands in opposite directions (Figure 6.13).

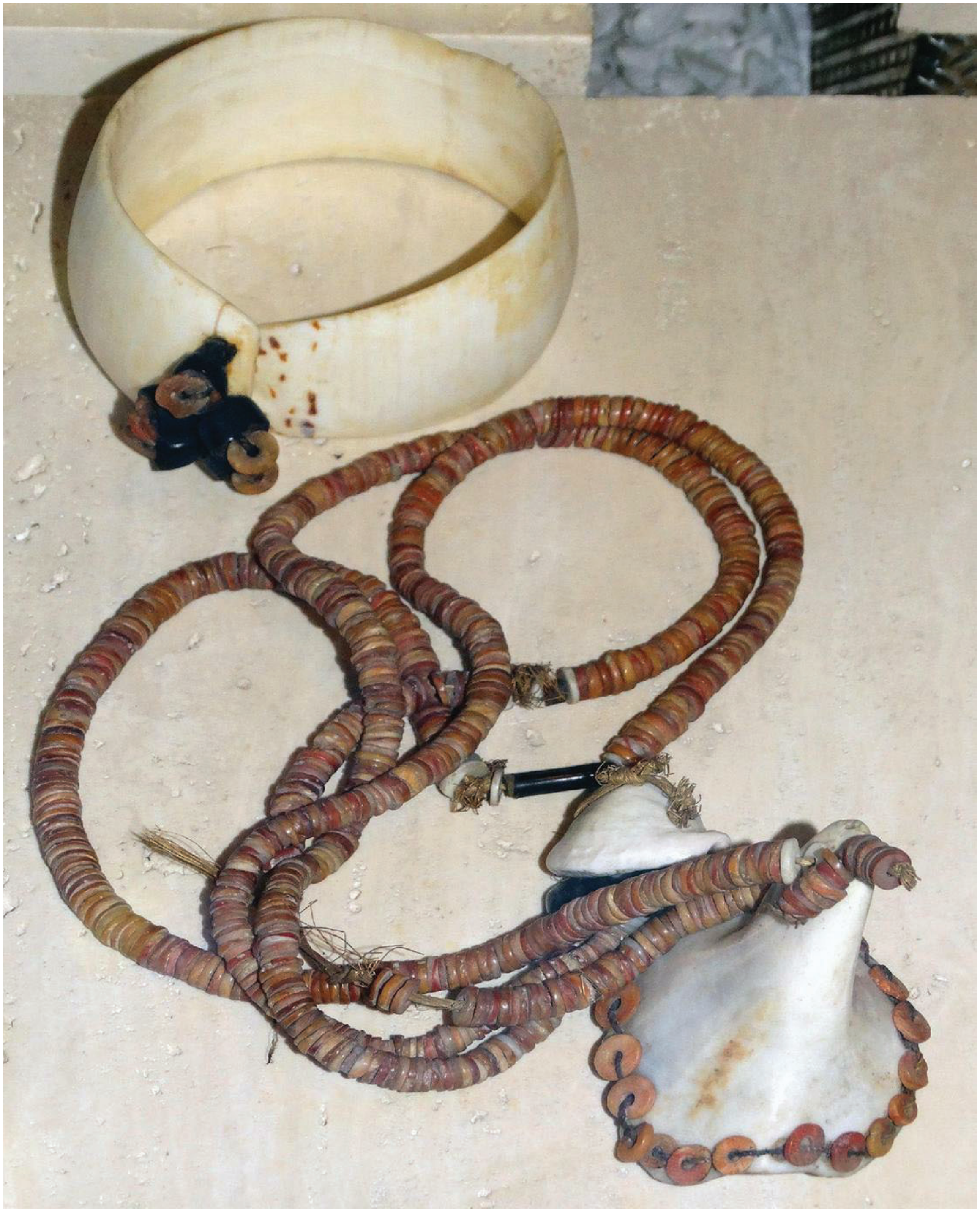


Figure 6.13 *Mwali* (top) and *soulava* (bottom) are key valuables in the kula trade, an extensive system of intertribal trade among a ring of islands east of Papua New Guinea). *Mwali* and *soulava* are always traded in

opposite directions around the ring.

World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Kula items are almost always traded between specific exchange partners, and such partnerships are usually enduring. A trader from one island visits their exchange partner on a different island. The exchange partner presents the trader with *mwali* or *soulava* depending on where the trader has come from. The trader returns home with the *mwali* or *soulava*. Months or years later, the partner will visit the trader on the trader’s island and will return home after receiving the other kind of kula valuable. Kula valuables gain (and sometimes lose) fame from the distances they have traveled and the people who have possessed them (Damon, 2002). Although kula items can be permanently owned, people generally hold them for a while and then pass them on. Their goal is to have valuable, famous, and beautiful objects in their possession and circulating among their friends and kula partners (Weiner, 1992, pp. 144–146).

In addition to the trade in kula valuables, there is a second, less public system of trade called *gimwali* that includes foods such as yams and bananas, manufactured items such as canoes, ax blades, and many other goods (Damon, 1983; Fortune, 1932). These goods are often unavailable in the district in which they are given. Thus, the kula trade allows groups to specialize in different aspects of production, and this leads to an increase in both the amount of food and the quantity and quality of craft production within the region (Spielmann, 2002). In addition to promoting economic intensification, both the kula trade itself and the preparations for it reinforce ties among participants and help ensure that relations among trading partners are relatively friendly. This is important because there is no formal government incorporating the different groups that take active roles in the kula.

Although the actual kula partners are men in many cases, both men and women play important roles in the kula trade. On the Trobriand Islands, women’s wealth and status connections are more enduring than those of men. Women use their power and wealth to support men in both kula and other forms of trade (Weiner, 1976).

On one level, the kula is simply an exchange of goods. However, Malinowski demonstrated that the trade is infused with a great many cultural norms and values related to Trobriand life. It has complex cultural, social, and psychological meanings for its participants. Kinship and political structure, magic, prestige, economy, technology, myth, ritual, feasting, and especially friendship and alliance all come together in the kula. Weiner (1976) extended this analysis, pointing out that kula items and other elements of trade have important symbolic significance and that exchanges help their participants both maintain and represent their social order. Thus, the system of balanced reciprocity found in the kula trade contributes to the integration of Trobriand society as well as the maintenance of economic and social relations among all its participants.

Negative Reciprocity

Negative reciprocity happens when people use deception or force to cause the person or group they are trading with to give them a higher value than the goods traded for are worth to either party. Deception, cheating, and theft are examples of negative reciprocity. Negative reciprocity is characteristic of both impersonal and unfriendly transactions. It happens among groups that are hostile to one another and among people who do not expect to conduct future transactions. It is the unsociable extreme in exchange.

Many societies distinguish between the insider, whom it is morally wrong to cheat, and the outsider, from whom every advantage may be gained. Clyde Kluckhohn, who studied the Navajo in the 1940s and 1950s, reported that their rules for interaction varied with the situation; to deceive when trading with outsiders was a morally accepted practice (Kluckhohn, 1959).

Another good example of negative reciprocity is the historic relationship between traditional dynastic China and the nomadic empires of Mongolia. The ability of Mongol empires to benefit their constituent tribes was based on their capacity to extract wealth and resources from China. They did this by following a policy of violent raiding. Because the nomads were highly mobile, war against them was prohibitively expensive, and the Chinese were repeatedly forced to buy peace from the nomads, essentially paying protection money. The threat of violence lay under the surface of all interactions between the two groups (Barfield, 1993, pp. 150–155).

Negative reciprocity may be characteristic of certain types of transactions in market economies as well. The e-mail scam artist offering to deposit millions in your bank account if you will only provide your account number and other personal information is engaged in negative reciprocity, as is the Wall Street manager who offers high returns on investment but who then steals your money. The issue of honesty in market transactions is further explored later in the chapter within the “Market Exchange” section.

Redistribution

In **redistribution**, goods are collected from or contributed by members of a group and then given out to the group in a new pattern. There is a social center to which goods are brought and from which they are distributed. Redistribution occurs in many different contexts. In household food sharing, pooled resources are reallocated among family members. In state societies, it is achieved through taxation: Governments collect resources and then redistribute them according to their political goals.

Redistribution is especially important in horticultural societies where political organization includes **bigmen**, self-made leaders who gain power and authority through personal achievement (we describe bigmen more fully in Chapter 7). Such individuals collect goods and food from their supporters. Often these items are given away in communal feasts that the bigman sponsors to sustain his political power and raise his prestige. Redistribution also occurred in chiefdoms. In these cases, however, a distinct hierarchy was involved. Chiefs collected goods and staple foods from many communities to support their households and attendants as well as to finance large public feasts that helped solidify their power (Earle, 1987; also see Chapter 11).

The Potlatch

Potlatch feasting is a good example of redistribution and, like the kula trade, a very famous case study in anthropology. **Potlatches** are competitive feasts held among Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest Coast. The Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl), Tlingit, and other Native American societies hold potlatches to honor and validate the rank of chiefs and other notables (Figure 6.14). Potlatches are frequently held in connection with births, deaths, and marriages (Rosman & Rubel, 1971). A leader holding a potlatch called on his followers to supply food and other goods to be consumed and distributed during a feast to which he invited group members and rivals. At a potlatch, the host publicly traced his line of descent and claimed the right to certain titles and privileges. Each of these claims was accompanied by the giving away, and sometimes the destruction, of large quantities of food as well as goods such as blankets and carved wooden boxes that had been supplied by the host and his followers. As these were given or destroyed, the host and his supporters boasted of their wealth and power. In the early 20th century, Franz Boas collected speeches given at potlatches, such as this one:

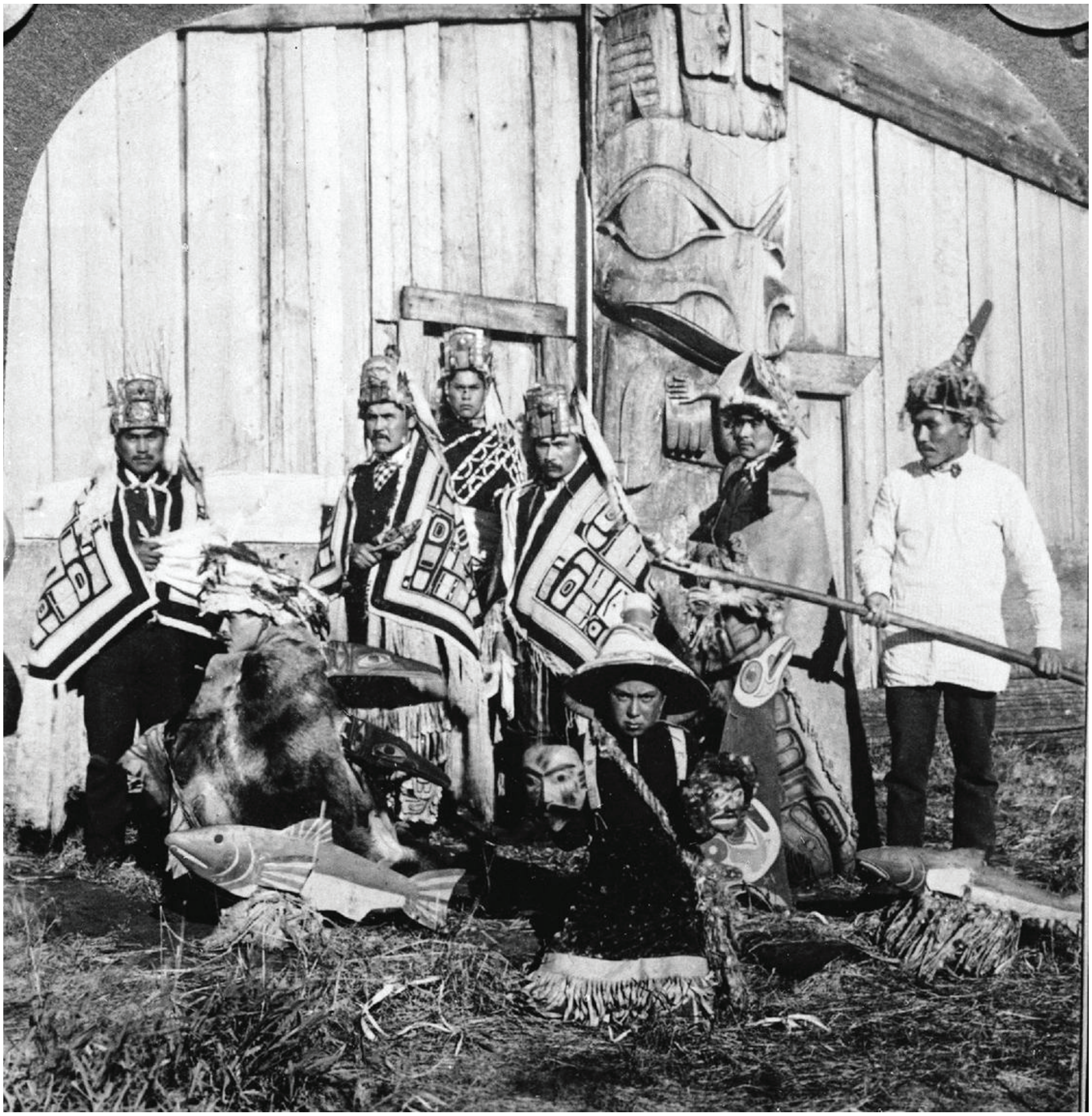


Figure 6.14 Potlatches are competitive feasts held among Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Potlatching chiefs gain prestige by redistributing a wide variety of goods. Here, a group of Haida people wearing potlatch regalia pose in 1901.

Hulton Archive/Getty Images

> I am Yaqatlentlis … I am Great Inviter. … Therefore I feel like

> laughing at what the lower chiefs say, for they try in vain to down me by talking against my name. Who approaches what was done by my ancestors, the chiefs? Therefore I am known by all the tribes over all the world. Only the chief my ancestor gave away property in a great feast, and all the rest can only try to imitate me. (Benedict, 1934, p. 191)

The feasting and gifts given at a potlatch demonstrated the host’s right to the titles and rights he claimed and created prestige for him and his followers. Guests either acknowledged the host’s claims or refuted them by staging an even larger potlatch. Thus, potlatching involved friendship but also competition and rivalry.

From an economic perspective, the drive for prestige engendered by the potlatch encouraged people to produce more food and goods than they would otherwise consume, even though this increased the amount of work they did. Because this wealth was given to people who traveled substantial distances to come to a potlatch, it was distributed to a fairly large population and ecological area.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Canadian government authorities saw the potlatch as a waste of resources and evidence of native irrationality. They believed that saving was the key to economic success and, to them, the potlatch focus on consumption and destruction of goods was both disturbing and wasteful. As a result, potlatching was outlawed between 1884 and 1951 (Bracken, 1997). Since then, the potlatch has been revived but primarily as a symbol of tribal identity rather than a major element in tribal economy. Simeone (1995) and Stearns (1975), for example, reported that the Tanacross and Haida people consider the potlatch a central symbol of cooperation and respect that separates native from nonnative peoples.

Although the term *potlatch* refers specifically to the feasting of Northwest Coast people, Rosman and Rubel (1971, p. xii) reported that rivalrous, competitive feasting is found among many peoples. It is common, for example, throughout the Pacific Islands. We may even see some elements of it in our own society. There may be competition within families or with communities to throw the largest and most elaborate holiday parties, weddings, or coming-of-age celebrations (such as a confirmation, bar or bat mitzvah, or quinceañera). In all these cases, the prestige that accrues to the people who give the party is a critical factor. This reminds us that there is much more to giving a gift than simply trying to determine what another person desires.

Leveling Mechanisms

Redistribution may either increase or decrease inequality within a society. A **leveling mechanism** is a practice, value, or form of social organization that results in evening out the distribution of wealth by forcing accumulated resources or capital to be used in ways that reduce economic differences. Such mechanisms ensure that social goals are considered along with economic ones.

Leveling mechanisms take many different forms. For example, if an economy is based around redistribution and generosity is the basis of prestige, those who desire power and prestige will distribute as much wealth as they receive. The potlatch described earlier is a good example of this. The *moka*, a type of large feast in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, is another. There, men who wish to gain prestige prepare for many years for these events, accumulating wealth in the form of pigs, shells, cassowary feathers, and, in the modern world, money and manufactured goods. At the feast, all this wealth is given away to those who attend (Stewart & Strathern, 2002).

Manning Nash (1967) described many leveling mechanisms that operate in the village of Amatenango in the Chiapas district of Mexico. One is the organization of production by households. As mentioned earlier, economic expansion and accumulation of wealth are limited where households, rather than business firms, are the productive units. A second factor in Amatenango is inheritance: All a man’s children share equally in his estate. This makes it difficult for large estates to persist over generations. Accusations of witchcraft are a third leveling mechanism. Should anyone in Amatenango manage to accumulate more than their neighbors, members of other families are likely to accuse them of witchcraft, and people thought to be witches are often killed. Witchcraft accusations are most often leveled at those who are rich but not generous.

Finally, Amatenango and many other villages have cargo systems. In a **cargo system**, men in the village must annually assume many different cargos, or religious offices. Assuming such a cargo is an expensive proposition. The officeholder cannot work full-time, and the obligations of the cargo involve substantial purchases and donations, which take up some of a family's extra resources. A man must serve in 12 such cargos before he can retire from public life, so the cost continues throughout adulthood. In addition to these 12 offices, there is the position of *alférez*, a ritual office filled by a younger man. One of the requirements of being *alférez* is sponsoring a community feast, which involves paying for the food and liquor and renting costumes. Men are selected for the cargos and the *alférez* by their ability to pay. Thus, the cargo system is a way of forcing the most prosperous households of the village to redistribute some of their wealth.

Community obligations such as a system of expensive religious offices may help to limit the economic gap between the relatively rich and the poor, but they do not eliminate it. Rather, they may help to preserve it. Men who take cargos gain prestige, differentiating themselves from the poor of the village. Increased prestige often leads to increased wealth. Cancian (1989) showed that in Zinacantan, which has a system of cargos or religious offices similar to that of Amatenango, men who took on cargos remained rich throughout their lives, whereas poor families incapable of filling such offices remained poor. Thus, although it does redistribute some of the wealth in the community, the cargo system in Mexican villages may serve to reinforce economic differences among families rather than equalize them (Cancian, 1989, p. 147).

The cargo system still exists throughout Mesoamerica, but it may be losing influence. For example, Mary O'Connor (2016, p. 88) has noted that, in recent years, fewer people among the Mixtec are willing to take cargo offices. She links this to the increasing presence of modern consumer goods and argues that, like holding cargo offices, these also give their owners prestige but don't require giving anything away. Szeljak (2016) reports that, because the cargo system is tied to Catholic religious observance, it is threatened by the success of Protestant missionary activity in many indigenous communities.

Market Exchange

Today, **market exchange** is the principal distribution mechanism in most of the world's societies. Goods and services are bought and sold at a price determined, at least in theory, by the forces of supply and demand. Unlike reciprocity and redistribution, in which the social and political roles of those who exchange are important, a market exchange in principle is impersonal and occurs without regard to the social position of the participants.

The market involves a series of cultural and moral assumptions. For a market to run smoothly, most participants must believe that they will usually be treated fairly by people they do not know. Of course, the ideal of fair and impersonal exchange is just that—an ideal. Because of this, markets are almost always regulated by a political power that sets the rules for trade, enforces peace in the market, and punishes violations. What constitutes fair exchange varies from culture to culture, but markets are full of conflicts, inequities, and outright cheats. However, in most cases, individuals who believe they have been cheated or otherwise treated unfairly in the market can appeal to authorities and institutions such as rulers and court systems to redress their grievances.

The continued importance of social connections among market participants is well illustrated by electronic marketplaces such as eBay, where buyers and sellers come close to true anonymity. In these cases, a system of ratings simulates social connections and knowledge. This gives trading partners a degree of certainty that the terms of trade will be fair. But eBay participants know that the fewer and worse the ratings of their trading partners, the greater the risk for cheats and frauds. Further, as the electronic market has aged, people and corporations have found ways to cheat and game the rating systems. Now, there are apps like Fakespot and ReviewMeta that review the reviews to attempt to determine their accuracy. There are also services such as ReputationDefender and NetReputatation that attempt to counter bad reviews and negative information. The phrase *caveat emptor*, or “let the buyer beware,” neatly captures the notion that the rules of even trade are not always in force (Figure 6.15).

WORMWOOD
MOTORS
BEST BUY
$2250

Figure 6.15 Markets usually occur when political authorities can enforce fair, impersonal exchange. However, the phrase “let the buyer beware” captures the idea that the rules of even trade may not always be enforced. Here, Danny DeVito plays a dishonest used car salesman in the 1996 film *Matilda*.

Photo ©Columbia/Tristar pict./Supplied by Online USA, Inc. Getty Images/Stringer

In principle, the primary factors that set prices and wages in a market are related to supply and demand. Individuals participate freely in a market, choosing what they buy and sell. These principles are almost never perfectly attained. In some cases, wealthy and powerful individuals, organizations, and industries fix prices or wages, forcing people into wage labor or the market at disadvantageous terms. In other cases, cultural ideas about the proper or “just price” of a good or service are more important than supply and demand. Sometimes governments control or influence the prices of commodities such as grain, setting them either high (to encourage farmers) or low (to feed often rebellious city dwellers cheaply).

The types of goods and services available in the market are almost always restricted in some way. As we have seen, people in many societies gain access to land, labor, and some goods through ties of kinship or obligations of reciprocity and redistribution. In such places, land and labor are difficult or impossible to purchase through markets. But all societies limit what may be bought and sold. We live in a market-dominated society, but for moral, social, and political reasons, governments limit trade in certain goods and regulate trade in others. For example, there are restrictions on the sale of drugs, guns, children, college degrees, and many other goods and services.

In most societies where markets play an important role, black markets develop. These are institutions and arrangements that escape social regulation. In principle, anything may be purchased through black markets, including children and college degrees. However, not only do participants in black markets have no recourse to courts or other authorities if they are cheated, but governments and international agencies also pursue and penalize them. An example of this was Silk Road, a website that people used primarily to buy and sell drugs. U.S. authorities shut down Silk Road, and its founder and owner, Ross Ulbricht, is currently serving a sentence of life without parole. However, Silk Road 2.0 and then 3.0 emerged to take its place. Other sites like Dream Market and Wall Street Market popped up as well. These too were either shut down by authorities or, in the case of Wall Street Market (and several others), disappeared after their administrators stole millions from their users (Cimpanu, 2019). AlphaBay was shut down and its founder imprisoned in 2017 but had reemerged by fall 2021 (Lyngaas, 2021). In addition to drugs, AlphaBay also sold criminal services, including (allegedly) a “School Email Bomb Threat Service” (Green, 2017). It and its successors will no doubt shut down as well, but others will emerge, aided, perhaps, by the increasing popularity and importance of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum that make transactions difficult to trace. In a wholly unregulated market, there are no limits to what might be sold, and fraud, extortion, and outright theft are inevitable.

CAPITALISM

In the past 300 years, capitalism has become the world’s predominant economic system. Capitalism expanded from northern Europe, North America, and Japan and has transformed economies worldwide, connecting them in a complex, integrated international economy (Wallerstein, 1995). In Chapter 15, we describe this historic process, and in Chapter 16, we examine and analyze the problems and promises of the global economy. Here, we focus on describing capitalism and pointing out some of its most salient features.

In noncapitalist societies, most people produce goods to consume them, trade them for other goods, or pay rents and taxes. In capitalist societies, firms produce goods to create wealth. For example, General Motors (GM) is not really in business to make cars. General Motors is in business to increase the wealth of its shareholders. Manufacturing automobiles is one (but only one) of the ways it tries to achieve that end. GM is also heavily involved in banking and was historically involved in aviation, military contracting, and consumer products. You probably don’t think of GM as a refrigerator company, but it owned the appliance manufacturer Frigidaire from 1918 to 1978. Today, Frigidaire is owned by the Sweden-based company Electrolux, best known for making vacuum cleaners.

It can be difficult to see an economic system when one has lived their whole life inside of it. For readers raised in a capitalist society, the following description may sound like a series of natural laws of human behavior. However, as other parts of this chapter have shown, people do not behave in these ways in most societies. There have probably been some individuals who behaved like capitalists in many, if not most, societies. However, their behavior was often considered pathological rather than a model to emulate. For example, through most of medieval European history, the use of money to make more money was considered sinful.

Productive resources become capital when they are used with the primary goal of increasing their owner's financial wealth (Figure 6.16). In capitalism, this becomes the most common (though not the only) use of such resources. Capitalism is further characterized by three fundamental attributes. First, most productive resources are owned by a small portion of the population. Banks, corporations, and wealthy individuals own the vast majority of farms, factories, and businesses of all kinds. The distribution of the ownership of stock (shares in publicly traded companies) is a good measure of this. Although many Americans invest in businesses through ownership of stocks, mutual funds, and retirement plans, substantial wealth is highly concentrated. For example, in the United States in 2019, the poorest half of the population (measured by household net assets) owned almost no directly held stocks. The top 10% of U.S. households held 92% of all directly held stock. And more than half of this was held by the top 1% of households. In 2020, the stock market rose 16% (as measured by the S&P index). This was equivalent to a gain of $4 trillion, but of that, $3.4 trillion went to the wealthiest 10% of U.S. families (Gebeloff, 2021). Thus, although a great many people can claim some ownership of businesses, the vast majority of the ownership is held by very few.

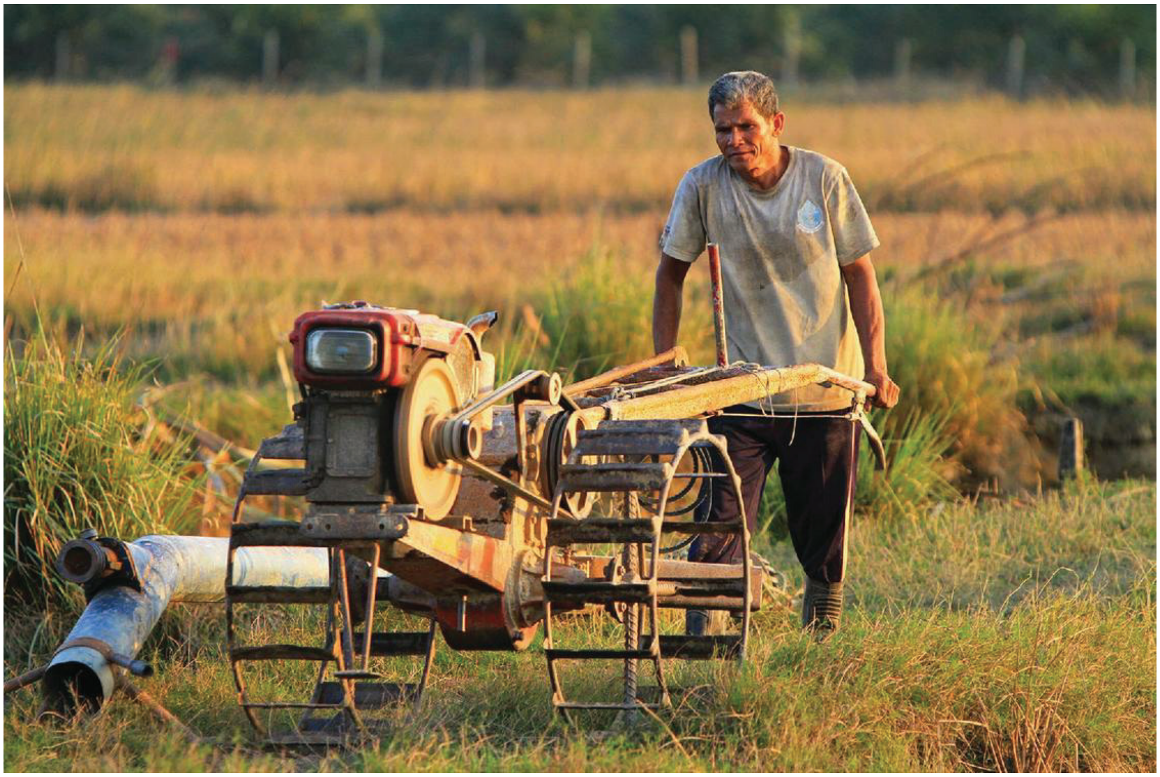


Figure 6.16 Productive resources, such as the mechanized plow this farmer in Thailand is operating, become capital when they are used in ways intended to increase their owner’s financial wealth.

iStockphoto.com/khunpepe

The second attribute of capitalism is that most individuals’ primary resource is their labor. To survive, people sell their labor for a salary or an hourly wage. Most Americans, for example, work for large or small corporations that they do not own or for nonprofit organizations, or they are employed by the local, state, or federal government. For example, in 2019, there were a bit more than 1.5 million people employed as faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Two thirds of these worked at public institutions, so they were employed by state and local governments. Most of the remaining third were employed at nonprofit institutions, but more than 68,000 worked at profit-making corporations (IES-NCES, 2020).

The third attribute of capitalism is that the value of workers' contribution to production is always intended to be greater than the wages they receive. The difference between these two is the profit that accrues to those who own the productive resources—generally the shareholders of a corporation (Plattner, 1989b, pp. 382–384). The extremely high wages of some professional athletes and entertainers provide a good illustration of this principle. For example, the top-earning athlete in the United States. in 2021 was football quarterback Dak Prescott, who signed a 4-year contract extension with the Dallas Cowboys for $160 million and got a $66 million signing bonus on top of that (Kelly, 2021). For the team owner, Jerry Jones, Prescott's high salary was easily justified. Gilbert rightly believes that Prescott's presence on the team increases his own. Jones bought the Cowboys in 1989 for $140 million. In 2016, when Prescott's career with them began, its value had increased to $4.2 billion. In 2021, it stands at $6.5 billion (Statistica, 2021)[7]. Prescott's work has probably accounted for a significant percentage of that increase. Prescott's contract, along with more than $10 million in endorsement deals and other businesses, has made him a very wealthy man. His 2021 net worth is believed to be more than $40 million (Celebrity Net Worth, n.d.). However, Prescott's wealth pales next to that of Jones, who is believed to be worth about $10.5 billion, placing him at #86 on *Forbes*'s list of the wealthiest Americans (Forbes, 2021)[9].

In general, workers wish to receive as close to the full value of their labor as possible while owners wish to pay as small a portion of labor's value as possible. This frequently results in conflict between the two groups.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

UX (User Experience)

In the past several decades, greater numbers of anthropologists have sought employment in business and have been involved in designing some well-known consumer products. For example, ethnographic research conducted by Susan Squires and Bryan Byrne was instrumental in the development of Go-Gurt, a popular sweetened yogurt product marketed to parents of young children.

More recently, technology companies are among the biggest consumers of anthropology. Microsoft is reportedly the world's second-largest employer of anthropologists (D. Baer, 2014), and Women in Technology International Hall of Fame member and anthropologist Genevive Bell is a vice president and fellow at Intel as well as director of the company's Corporate Sensing and Insights group. Bell (n.d.) has said her job is "to make sense of what makes people tick, what delights and frustrates them, and to use those insights to help shape the next generation of technology insights."

George Anders (2015) noted that "throughout the major U.S. tech hubs … software companies are discovering that liberal arts thinking makes them stronger." There is a good reason for this. As technology progresses, many jobs on the technical side, such as software engineering, become automated. Fewer (but very highly skilled) people are needed to fill them. On the other hand, jobs related to how people use technology and how to market technology continue to increase. For example, in the spring of 2015, Facebook was advertising 146 jobs for software developers but 225 for sales and business development specialists.

A key intersection of anthropology and business is the development of the field of UX or user experience. UX refers to how people interact with products, services, and companies and how end users feel about the systems and objects they use, and how these fit into their lives. Part of this is simply measuring ease of use. However, a lot of it has to do with context, expectations, past experiences, and the ways people actually use things in their lives. Anthropological techniques such as participant observation are particularly useful in studying UX.

For Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel Rasmussen (2014), two of the principals of the anthropological consulting company ReD, the core of UX is sensemaking—the ways in which people bring “the complex interplay between their interior lives and their social, cultural, and physical worlds” to bear on how they understand and use goods and services. They point to their work with the toymaker Lego as an example. In the mid-2000s, Lego was failing in its attempt to move into new markets such as video games and action figures. The company produced products that looked cool but were not popular. To find out what parents and children wanted from Lego, the company did ethnographic research. Researchers spent time with families, interviewed parents and children, shopped with families, and took pictures. They found that what kids wanted from Legos was to escape from their overly structured lives and hone their skills. The new, more structured products didn’t allow kids to reach these goals in the ways that the old ones did. To survive, Lego needed to focus on its core business and make products that allowed kids greater freedom to play.

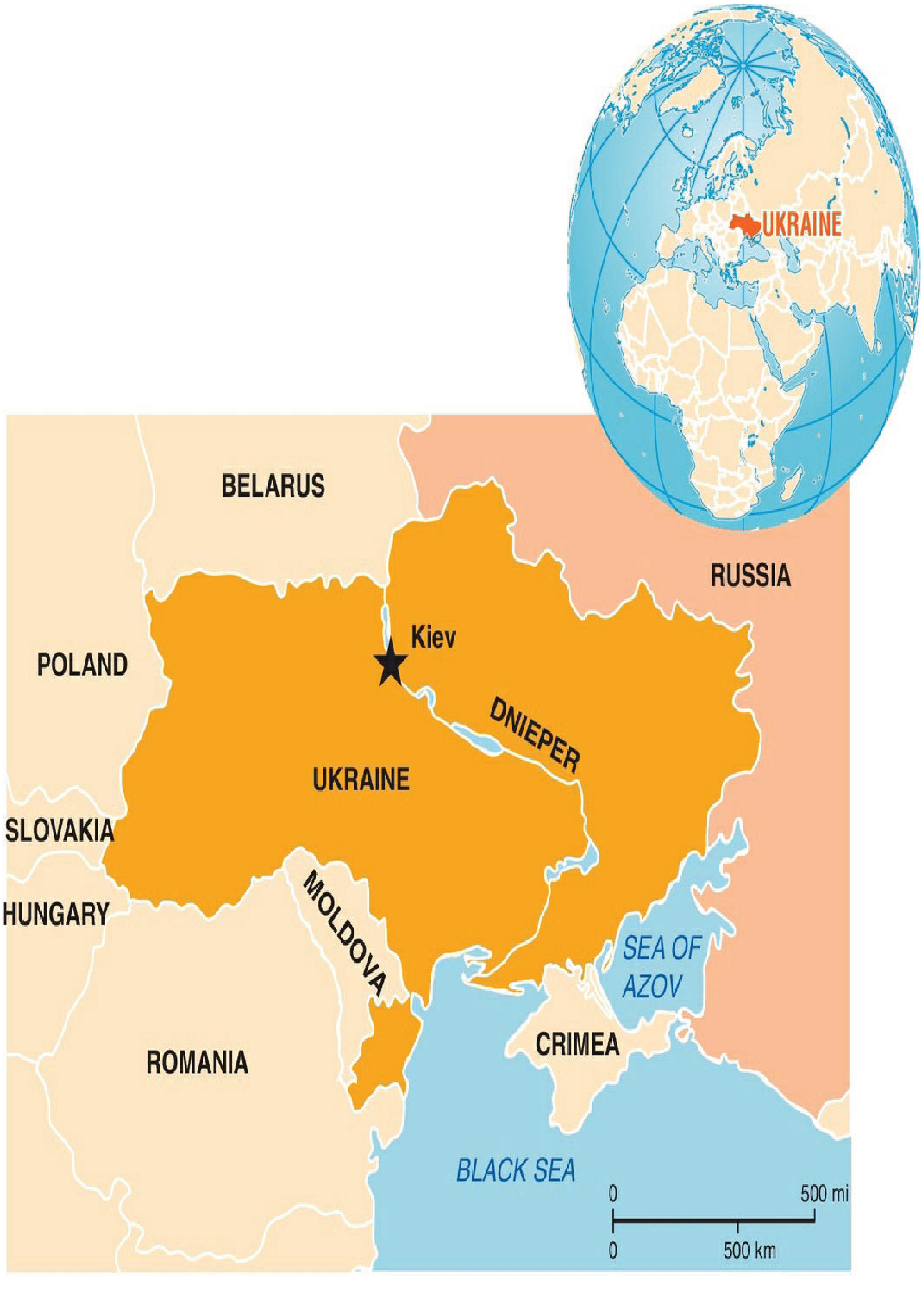
Anthropologists have made products more friendly and businesses more money. However, UX also raises some ethical problems. For example, anthropologists mine information from their informants. If corporations then profit from this information, is payment owed to the informants? Most anthropologists publish their research findings, but corporate research is usually private. Should it be? Some key consumers of anthropological research are beverage and packaged food companies, but should anthropologists be promoting the sale of sugary drinks and junk food? Should anthropology be used to help corporations make more money?

Gifts, Bribes, and Social Networks

Question: What’s the difference between a gift and a bribe?

Many classic anthropological studies have focused on gift exchange in relatively small societies without money. However, using gifts to build social networks that may serve instrumental purposes is part of large, current-day monetized societies as well. When this happens, it raises important questions about the line between a gift and a bribe. Good examples of this come from the countries of the former Soviet Union (though they certainly exist in our society as well). In Soviet times (1917–1991), having at least some money was relatively common, but goods that could be bought with the money were scarce. In this condition, a system called *blat* pervaded many aspects of life. *Blat* referred to social connections, reinforced by gift giving, that allowed people to gain access to goods, services, employment, and often admission to universities. A proverb of the era said, “better 100 friends than 100 rubles.”

In the post–Soviet Union era, *blat* and other arrangements persist but they are increasingly complicated. Now, goods are widely available in most places in the former Soviet Union, but money to buy them is not. Abel Polese (2008) examined gift giving and corruption in Ukraine in the early 2000s and found a wide gray area between the two. The Ukrainian government was unable to provide many services to its citizens. Salaries paid to government workers, including doctors and teachers, were inadequate to cover their living expenses. In this context, money and goods received by doctors and teachers from their patients and students were extremely important to their economic survival, and it became very common for people receiving services to offer such gifts. However, are these really gifts, or are they bribes? The Ukrainian government declared that it was illegal for government employees (including doctors and teachers) to receive gifts of any kind. However, in practice, the government tolerated these practices to avoid paying higher wages.


UKRAINE
BELARUS
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Description

The perspectives of the participants themselves were nuanced. In at least some cases, people giving gifts and payments saw these as signs of gratitude rather than bribes. For many, the sequence of events was important: A payment received before taking an exam or undergoing surgery is a bribe, payment afterward, a gift. The specific actions of the service provider also make a difference. Teachers may allow students to pass exams and doctors might provide services in expectation of receiving a gift, but they believe that is different from requiring an upfront payment. As one of Polese's informants expressed it: "If I receive it, it's a gift. If I demand it, then it is a bribe" (2008, p. 53).

Neither gift givers nor gift receivers understand their actions as simple corruption. But neither do these transactions create the ongoing social ties typical of most gift giving. Such transactions are not exactly gifts and not exactly bribes, and Polese proposes the term *brift*, halfway between gift and bribe, to describe them. He argues that brifting is a fundamental aspect of Ukrainian social life and that although brifts in some cases do harm Ukraine's social and economic structures, they are "complementary to an economic system that does not guarantee even distribution of welfare" (2008, p. 57). Ukraine's corruption problems increased until the Russian invasion of 2014. Since then, however, the government has taken steps to control and eliminate corruption. Increased monitoring of officials' assets, moving many state services online, and the establishment of a strong and independent national anticorruption bureau have improved both honesty and the democratic process in the country (Kaleniuk, 2021). In fall 2021, Russia, led by Vladimir Putin, massed troops on its border with Ukraine. It invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, starting a brutal war that has left tens of thousands dead and millions displaced. Putin claimed that there were deep historic ties between Russia and Ukraine, and these do exist. However, the real issue might be that Ukraine's relative success in controlling corruption, its increasingly democratic society, and its close ties to Western European nations posed a threat to Putin’s control of an increasingly autocratic Russia (Troianovski, 2021). Ukraine remains fairly corrupt. It ranks as number 117 out of 180 on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index. But Russia is even more corrupt, ranking at 129 (Transparency International, n.d.)[11].

Corruption is an important force in the United States as well. Transparency International ranks the United States as 27 on its corruption index, far better than Ukraine or Russia but worse than countries including Finland, Singapore, Germany, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Uruguay. The federal government currently prosecutes between 350 and 600 corruption cases against federal, state, and local officials as well as law enforcement personnel each year (Trac Reports, n.d.)[13]. Recent corruption trials in the United States seem to turn on some of the same issues Polese described in Ukraine. In 2014, former Virginia governor Bob McDonnell and his wife were indicted on federal corruption charges. McDonnell received more than $175,000 from Jonnie Williams, then the head of Star Scientific, a company that produced a dietary supplement called anatabine. The McDonnells publicly spoke about the value of anatabine, hosted events for Star Scientific at the governor’s mansion, and encouraged researchers at the University of Virginia to apply for state funding to study anatabine. Was this corruption or just gift giving among friends? The U.S. District Court found McDonnell and his wife guilty of corruption. However, in 2016, the Supreme Court reversed this decision, arguing that corruption required a more specific quid pro quo. More recently, New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez was similarly accused. Menendez received both gifts and political donations from Salomon Melgen, a Florida eye doctor. Menendez received free flights on Melgen’s private jets and Menendez’s Political Action Committee received more than half a million dollars from Melgen. Menendez also helped three of Melgen’s foreign-born girlfriends get U.S. visas and helped Melgen settle an $8.9 million dispute with Medicare. Again, gift giving among friends or corruption? An 11-week trial ended in a hung jury. The Justice Department attempted to retry Menendez, but in January 2018, all charges against him were dropped. More recently, in 2022, New York Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin was alleged to have gotten state-funded grants in exchange for contributions to his own political campaign. Benjamin was forced to resign his position. As of this writing, his case has not been tried (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022).

The links between politicians and major donors in the United States have been further complicated by the 2010 Supreme Court *Citizens United* decision allowing essentially unrestricted and anonymous campaign contributions to political candidates. And this was even further complicated by the mixing of business and politics, which became common in the Trump administration. By 2019, patronizing hotels and resorts owned by Trump became common practice for those looking for something from the administration. Paying to use Trump properties didn't guarantee a political return, but people have learned that it didn't hurt either (Lipton & Karni, 2019). Perhaps both the politicians and those who give to them have become brifters.

Resistance to Capitalism

Capitalism is a powerful economic system. It undoubtedly provides a greater number of goods and services to larger populations than other ways of organizing an economy, but it does so at a cost. When some individuals or groups own or control basic resources, others must inevitably be denied access to these resources. This results in permanently differentiated economic and social classes. Capitalism dictates that there will always be rich and poor. Often, part of the population lives in extreme poverty, without access to basic resources—in American society, this includes the homeless, the landless rural poor, and the permanently unemployed.

Poverty in capitalist societies punishes weakness, failure, or ill fortune in a way that is harsher than in other forms of economic organization described in this chapter. Foraging, herding, gardening, and most nonindustrial agricultural societies provide work for all. Although there is inequality in these societies, in most cases, for most of the population, differences in wealth are relatively small. Contemporary capitalist societies, which are characterized by well-coordinated, specialized labor forces, increasingly require that individuals be skilled, mobile, and educated to succeed. They provide extraordinary rewards to some (but certainly not all) people who are highly educated, highly creative, or both, as well as to people who are members of what billionaire investor Warren Buffett has called “the lucky sperm club” —those who happen to be born to wealth. However, even when economic times are good, many people are inevitably left out.

The creation of global systems of exchange between suppliers of money, suppliers of goods, and consumers of those goods results in complex patterns of inequality both within and between nations. The overwhelming power of international capitalism connects and alters cultures in new ways.

Not all societies, or all individuals within a society, are able or willing to participate in the capitalist economy. Historically, the expansion of capitalism was accompanied by the wide-scale destruction of noncapitalist societies, a process examined in more detail in Chapter 14. Further, although capitalism has now expanded into every part of the world, there are probably no countries where all the population is directly involved in it. In many areas, noncapitalist groups remain, although they are often pushed to geographically marginal areas, such as the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan or the jungles of Brazil. In other places, issues of race, gender, and ethnicity prevent people from fully participating in the capitalist economy. However, even in these locations, mass-produced goods, media, and fashions from capitalist societies are easily found.

Despite the international success of capitalism, it has from its origins encountered frequent and sometimes violent resistance. In the early 19th century, Luddites smashed the weaving machines of early capitalists in a futile attempt to preserve skilled labor and the cottage industry. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, radical unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World campaigned for the abolition of capitalism and wage labor. In the 1960s, anticapitalist protests broke out across Europe, Japan, and the United States. Protests in France in 1968 were particularly widespread as workers joined student protesters to bring the nation to the brink of revolution. Protests continued in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with riots and mass arrests accompanying meetings of major capitalist institutions such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, protests broke out again in many places. The best known of these was the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011, which began in New York but rapidly became global, with rallies held in more than 900 cities throughout the world (Adam, 2011). Although support for the movement eventually diminished, resistance to the current distribution of wealth continues. In 2015, a Gallup Poll reported that 63% of Americans believe that wealth should be distributed more evenly, a percentage that has remained consistent since then (Newport, 2015, 2019).

In addition to taking to the street in protest, people resist capitalism in other, more subtle ways. The fundamental social arrangement of capitalism is that most people sell their labor for wages to capitalists who reinvest profit to create greater wealth. However, many people in the United States and throughout the world neither work for wages nor hire workers and make investments to increase their wealth. In the United States, they often get by using a combination of techniques that include subsistence gardening, garage sales, and trading their labor with others (Figure 6.17). They do consistent wage labor only when they absolutely must, taking part-time jobs or leaving full-time employment as soon as they have enough cash for an immediate need (Halperin, 1990; Hansen, 1995). And this is not only an American phenomenon: Wilson found that people who drove horse carriages (jarveys) in Ireland were often fleeing wage labor. Other members of their families worked in factories, and they had previous experience with wage labor but had given it up. One man said that even if they paid him twice as much to work in a factory, he’d rather drive a carriage (Wilson, 2003, p. 303).

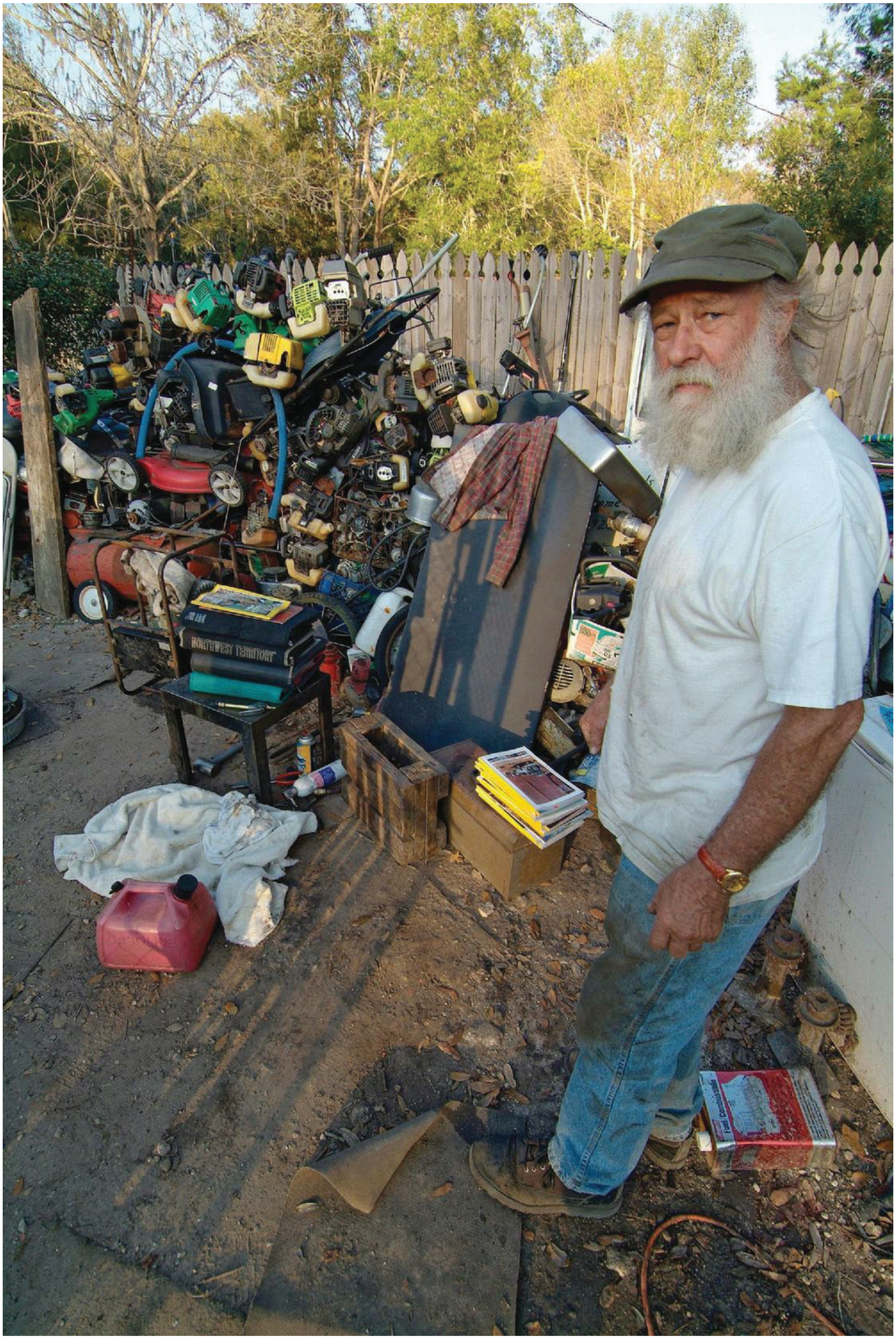
NORTHWEST TERRITORY

Figure 6.17 Garage sales, gardening, raising livestock, and doing odd jobs help many Americans avoid full participation in the capitalist economy.

imac/Alamy Stock Photo

In the United States, individuals are often very proud of their ability to support themselves outside the boundaries of wage labor. However, the fact that they can resist principal elements of capitalism (perhaps unknowingly) reminds us that economic systems are not natural and inevitable. The ways in which we organize our economy are the result of history, politics, economics, and individual choices—a creation of culture, not natural law.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: PAYING FOR COLLEGE IN THE UNITED STATES

As almost everyone reading this book will be aware, college is expensive, and its cost has been rising. In 1970, the total cost for a year of college at a 4-year public university was about $1,400. College costs increased only at the rate of inflation until the mid-1980s and then started to rise rapidly. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, corrected for inflation, the cost of a year at a 4-year public college or university (including tuition, fees, room and board) rose from $8,604 in 1985 to almost $17,000 in 2010 (NCES, 2019).

In the past decade, costs have soared. For the 20212022 school year, the average estimated cost of attending a year of college is $27,330 for in-state students and public universities, $44,150 for out of state students at these universities, and $55,800 for students at private, nonprofit universities (CollegeBoard, 2021). Many prestigious universities have tuition room and board costs well above $75,000 a year. The cost of the 2021–2022 school year at Columbia University is almost $85,000. The University of Chicago, Harvey Mudd College, Oberlin College, and many others are nearly as expensive (CollegeCalc, 2022; Statistica, 2022).

In her 2019 book *Indebted: How Families Make Make College Work at Any Cost*, anthropologist Caitlin Zaloom reports that the changes in the cost of a university education reflect major political shifts in beliefs about the role that postsecondary education is supposed to play in society. These have caused very important changes in family dynamics and in the economic relationship between children and their parents.

Throughout the 20th century, American understandings of education were strongly influenced by the ideas of the educational philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). Dewey, a friend and colleague of founding anthropologist Franz Boas, believed that education was fundamental to democracy. Its purpose was to “teach students how to fashion novel habits, dispositions, and institutions, serving to advance democracy as circumstances evolve” (Zaloom, 2019, p. 169). Under this philosophy, education was a public good: Universities were primarily of benefit to the nation. Students had to be free to follow their interests and inclinations since the flexibility this produced would best serve the nation.

Beginning in the 1980s, Dewey’s philosophy of education began to be replaced by a different idea: University education existed to ensure high future incomes for the individual. Thus, education moved from being considered primarily good for the nation to being understood as primarily good for the individual. Two further ideas followed from this. First, if the main purpose of university education was jobs, then universities must stress producing students with the specific skills demanded by industry. Second, if the primary benefit was to the individual, then individuals should cover almost all the cost of their educations. The fact that, adjusted for inflation, overall state funding for public higher education in 2017 was almost $9 billion below its level in 2008 reflects this shift from education as a public benefit to education as a private good (Zaloom, 2019, p. 195).

The increase in the cost of higher education has hit middle-class families extremely hard and changed the economic relationship between parents and children. Zaloom conducted more than 160 interviews with middle-class families that were trying to cope with college admissions and finance. She found that her participants believed that ensuring that their children were able to attend college and achieve degrees was critical to maintaining their middle-class identity. Parents deeply wished to provide their children with an “open future” (p. 8).

Particularly for college-educated parents, providing a college education for children was understood as a sacred trust between generations. Both parents and children believed that higher education was critical to children achieving their potential. Zaloom (2019) writes, “As a bedrock premise, potential organizes middle-class parents’ feelings of obligation to their children, and of their children’s expectations for their lives” (p. 157).

The cost of higher education means that very few middle-class families can simply pay the price of college out of income and savings. Instead, they become immersed in a system of grants from universities and loans from the federal government and private lenders. These loans are carried by students themselves and by their parents. Students and parents both want financial independence, but college financing makes that difficult. In the 1980s, more than half of people in their 20s were fully financially independent. Today, almost 70% receive money from their parents (Zaloom, 2019, p. 96). Zaloom refers to the condition this generates as “enmeshed autonomy.”

There are college savings plans, loans, and grants that are supported and promoted by the federal government. However, these are very heavily biased toward the well-to-do and toward certain kinds of families. The 529 plan is a good example. Parents can save for their children’s education using tax-free 529 plans. Most families can’t afford to put more than $50 to $100 a month into this kind of savings. But, for a child born in 2000, $50 a month will add up only to only $10,000 when the child is 18 (assuming the investment tracked the stock market). This is a relatively trivial amount compared to the cost of a college education in 2018. On the other hand, many wealthy Americans can afford to make $15,000 a year in tax-free contributions, and this results in enormous tax savings for them. Consequently, these plans strongly favor the wealthy. Given this, it’s unsurprising that only about 3% of Americans invest in 529s (Zaloom, 2019, pp. 32–33).

Most families begin their engagement with the student finance complex through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA. However, as Zaloom points out, this too favors certain kinds of families. Nuclear families with parents living together who own their own homes and have retirement accounts are advantaged in the FAFSA process. It especially helps if the members of these families are open with each other about their finances, closely monitor these finances, and agree about their goals. The more distant families are from this model, the more difficult the FAFSA process is for them and the more resources paying for college will demand of them. Zaloom (2019) says, “Although the FAFSA is written in the wan hand of the accountant, it rings with the moral voice of the preacher” (p. 73).

The lack of public financial support for higher education is a key factor promoting inequality in American society. Those who graduate debt free are likely to come from wealthier families, have greater freedom to pursue the career paths of their choice, and be wealthier later in life. The think tank Demos has found that average student debt reduces the wealth of college-educated couples by almost $200,000 (Zaloom, 2019, p. 185). If we wish to address inequality in the United States, we must find a better way to finance university education.

You Decide

1. Should the United States offer free college tuition to all qualifying students? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?
2. What was your own experience with the FAFSA? How easy or how difficult did you find it to fill out? Does your family fit Zaloom’s model of the nuclear family that owns a home, shares responsibility, and exchanges financial information freely?
3. How well do you understand how your own education is being

financed? Do you know what you and your family members will owe when you graduate and how soon you will be required to start paying off your loans?

SUMMARY

1. What is economics and what is economic behavior? Economics is the study of the ways the choices people make combine to determine how their societies use their scarce resources to produce and distribute goods and services. Economists assume that people will generally engage in economizing behavior—that they will allocate their scarce goods and resources in ways that maximize their benefit.
2. What are productive resources? Give some examples. Productive resources are the things that members of a society need to participate in the economy, and access to them is basic to every culture. Such resources generally include land, labor, and knowledge.
3. How does the allocation of productive resources differ in foraging, pastoral, horticultural, and agricultural societies? In general, as social complexity increases, access to productive resources becomes more restricted. In foraging societies, all people usually have access to all resources. Among pastoralists, ownership of animals is vested in families and kin groups. Among horticulturalists, people may control land in which they have invested labor. Among agriculturalists, specific individuals own many productive resources.
4. What is the organization of labor and what are its key elements in most preindustrial societies? All societies assign specific jobs to specific groups of people. Labor must be organized for production to take place. In most preindustrial societies, labor is organized by gender and by household or kin group. Work that people both perform and receive helps establish them with respect in their social network and is often integral to their identity.
5. What is the relationship between population, social complexity, and specialization? As societies become more populous and

complex, the number of specialized jobs found in them increases. This is particularly true when societies are dependent on agriculture or industrialism. In preindustrial societies, like traditional India, kin groups may have rights or duties to perform specific jobs. Current-day wealthy societies have extremely high degrees of specialization. This creates great efficiency but involves changing notions of identity and often has heavy human costs.

6. What different systems of distribution are described in this chapter? In all societies, there are systems for distributing and consuming goods and services. Every society uses some combination of reciprocity, redistribution, and the market to redistribute goods and services and to provide patterns and standards for their consumption.
7. Define reciprocity and describe different types of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the mutual give-and-take of goods and services among people. In generalized reciprocity, individuals at a close social distance give and take without expecting immediate or specific return. Balanced reciprocity involves individuals at a medium social distance and includes a clear obligation to return goods of nearly equal value to those given. The kula trade in the Trobriand Islands is an example. Negative reciprocity is characteristic of impersonal or unfriendly relations and involves attempting to get the better of a trade.
8. What is redistribution and in what kinds of societies is it commonly found? In redistribution, goods are collected to a social center from which they are given out to the group in a new pattern. Redistribution occurs in many different contexts but is particularly common in societies that have bigmen, in chiefdoms, and in states. Potlatches among Northwest Coast Native Americans provide an example of redistribution. Some forms of redistribution act as leveling mechanisms, forcing wealthier individuals to disburse part of their riches to the rest of the community.
9. How does the economic history of Belize reflect connections between economy and culture? Belize has always been integrated into an international system of trade, from its earlier

days exporting logwood and mahogany to its more recent foray into tourism. This has had a deep impact on consumption patterns as ideas of the proper ways to eat were closely linked with European notions of propriety. The development of indigenous cuisine has been influenced by both nationalism and emigration as Belizeans have created ethnic restaurants in the United States and then imported that cuisine back to Belize.

10. What are the chief characteristics of market exchange and where is it found? In market exchange, goods and services are bought and sold at a money price determined by market forces. In principle, market exchange is impersonal and occurs without regard to the social position of the participants. However, markets are almost always regulated by a political power that sets the rules for trade, enforces peace, and punishes infractions. Market exchange is the most common mechanism of exchange in the world today and is found in most societies.
11. What are the defining characteristics of capitalism? In capitalism, the owners of productive resources use them to increase their financial wealth. In capitalist societies, productive resources are held primarily by a small percentage of the population, most people sell their labor for wages, and the value of people’s labor is always more than the wages they receive. Capitalism can be masked by other relationships such as reciprocity.
12. What is UX and how does it involve anthropologists? UX stands for user experience and refers to how people interact with products, services, and companies. Anthropological techniques are very useful in studying this. Many companies hire anthropologists to study how their products and services are used. This has made products more friendly and businesses more money.
13. How are gifts and bribes related in Ukraine and the United States? The difference between gift giving and corruption can be difficult to determine. In Ukraine, people once gave gifts to doctors and teachers but understood these as demonstrations of gratitude rather than bribes, despite the role such gifts played in increasing the income of doctors and teachers and ensuring access to medical services and passing grades. In the United

States, courts have held that if no specific quid pro quo can be demonstrated, large payments to politicians are gifts, even when the recipients provide many services to the gift givers.

14. Where is resistance to capitalism found and what forms does it take? Resistance to capitalism is found in almost all capitalist societies. Sometimes such resistance may take the form of movements for social change or violent revolution. However, in many places, people resist capitalism by owning productive resources that they use only for their own subsistence, avoiding wage labor, and limiting their participation in the market.
15. What changes have there been in college costs, and what are their effects? The cost of attending college has risen dramatically. Politically, higher education is increasingly seen as oriented toward personal success and less as a benefit to the nation. Increasing costs as well as systems of saving and financial aid strongly favor the middle class and the wealthy. This has led to increasing inequality.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. If one compares foragers, pastoralists, horticulturalists, and agriculturalists, is there a pattern of change in the allocation and control of resources?
2. Give some examples of the role reciprocity plays in current-day life in the United States. Do you believe there is any such thing as truly generalized reciprocity in U.S. society? If not, do you believe it exists anywhere?
3. What kinds of leveling mechanisms are present in current-day capitalist society? Are they effective in reducing economic inequality?
4. All market-based societies place limits on what can be bought and sold. What determines when it is appropriate to restrict the market? For example, should people be able to sell one of their kidneys? Why or why not?

Key Terms

balanced reciprocity (p. 165)

bigmen (p. 167)

capital (p. 155)

cargo system (p. 169)

division of labor (p. 150)

economizing behavior (p. 149)

firm (p. 158)

generalized reciprocity (p. 163)

household (p. 157)

kula trade (p. 165)

leveling mechanism (p. 169)

market exchange (p. 170)

negative reciprocity (p. 167)

potlatch (p. 167)

productive resources (p. 150)

reciprocity (p. 163)

redistribution (p. 167)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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The horizontal axis ranges from 0 to 2,000 in intervals of 250. The vertical axis represents education, which includes “Less than a high school diploma,” “High school diploma, no college,” “Some college, no degree,” “Associate degree”, “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” “Professional degree,” and “Doctoral degree.” The graph plots the data for “Median usual weekly earnings.”

The data from the graph is given in the table below. Values are approximate.

	Median usual weekly earnings
Less than a high school diploma	626
High school diploma, no college	809
Some college, no degree	899
Associate degree	963
Bachelor’s degree	1,334
Master’s degree	1,574
Professional degree	1,909
Doctoral degree	1,909

Back to image

A globe depicting Africa, Asia and Europe is at the top right corner of the map. Black Sea, Crimea, Sea of Azov, Russia, Dnieper, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova are marked and labeled. Kiev is marked with a star symbol.

7 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Kalla Gezahegn Woldedawit, chief of the Konso in southern Ethiopia. Trained as a civil engineer, Woldedawit returned to lead his village and mediate disputes between villages.

ERIC LAFFORGUE/Alamy Stock Photo

Learning Objectives

After you have read this chapter, you will be able to:

7.1 Describe the differences between power and authority and the roles that ideology, gender, and the punishment of social violations play in societies.

7.2 Analyze the distribution of power in band societies and explain how conflict is resolved in them.

7.3 Assess the distribution of power in tribal societies and evaluate the role of violence and warfare in them.

7.4 Explain the ways that chiefdoms are different from bands and tribes and describe the distribution of power in them.

7.5 Compare and contrast different theories of state formation and summarize the role that social stratification plays in states.

7.6 Tell how a nation-state is different from a state and describe the roles of education and ideology in nation-states.

7.7 Identify several reasons why statelessness is an important problem.

Political organization refers to the structures of power and authority in societies as well as the mechanisms used as societies attempt to preserve and re-create these structures. It also concerns the ways in which societies maintain and enforce behavioral patterns and regulate disputes among factions and individuals. Societies vary in their systems of political organization, and this diversity is a primary interest of anthropology.

A society’s political organization is related to many factors. One of the most important of these is how the society produces and distributes food and other goods. This, in turn, is connected to the ways individuals and groups access basic material resources, power, and prestige. Differential access to these produces systems of social hierarchy. And this is related to social complexity. Some societies have relatively few groups with little difference in power and prestige among them. Other societies have a great many groups with huge differences in power and prestige. Although political organization, social differentiation, and social complexity are sometimes studied separately, they are intimately connected.

It is extremely important to understand that in many important ways, all societies are the same. Although individuals within any group vary, no group of humans is smarter or less smart than another. No group of humans has more complex or sophisticated thoughts than another. None has more musical, artistic, philosophical, athletic, or military ability than another (unless, of course, they are specifically chosen from a larger group for those abilities). For more than a century, anthropologists have repeatedly demonstrated humanity’s radical equality. However, humans live in societies and these do have greater and lesser complexity in the sense that some have relatively small amounts of social differentiation and others far more. And different societies may focus on and reward different human talents. In other words, humans, taken as a whole, are all equal, but societies create differences, both through hierarchies of power and by rewarding some abilities but not others.

This chapter describes social differentiation and complexity in bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states, and modern nation-states. However, each of these is a theoretical construct, an “ideal type,” useful for analysis and understanding. Please remember that although these typologies are useful analytically, they hide a much more complex reality. Every ideal type includes many variations.

HIERARCHIES: POWER, IDEOLOGY, GENDER, AND CONFLICT

Inequalities exist in all societies: Individuals differ in talents, physical attractiveness, mental abilities, and skills. But not all societies formally recognize these inequalities, nor do individual differences in talents and skills necessarily affect access to important resources. Rather, inequalities are socially patterned. Anthropologists commonly distinguish three patterns of social differentiation: egalitarian societies, rank societies, and stratified societies.

In an **egalitarian** society, individual differences in skills and personality qualities are recognized, but no individual or group is denied the right to a livelihood or is subject to the control of others. Age, sex, and gender differences are a basis for social respect, but these statuses do not result in differences in the accumulation of wealth. In egalitarian societies, there is no inheritance of prestige or material goods between generations. These societies have no fixed number of social positions for which individuals must compete. The status of “good hunter” or “wise elder” can be filled by as many people as meet the cultural criteria. Egalitarian societies usually operate on the principle of generalized or balanced reciprocity in the exchange of goods and services (see Chapter 6) and are associated with the forms of political organization anthropologists call bands and tribes.

In **rank societies**, there are formal differences among individuals and groups in prestige and symbolic resources such as religious artifacts, clothing, or special forms of knowledge. Such social attributes may be inherited and thus limited to certain groups of people. However, all members of society have access to basic resources necessary for survival, such as land, water, and tools, through their membership in kinship groups. Rank societies are normally based on horticulture or pastoralism, which permit sufficient accumulation of food so that a surplus can be appropriated by leaders and redistributed throughout the society. Both redistribution and balanced reciprocity are characteristic modes of exchange in rank societies. Anthropologists refer to most ranked societies as chiefdoms.

Stratified societies have formal and permanent social and economic inequalities. Wealth, prestige, and office are frequently inherited, and some individuals and groups are denied access to the basic material resources needed to survive. Stratified societies are characterized by permanent differences among groups and individuals in their standard of living, security, prestige, political power, and the opportunity to fulfill one's potential. Such differences may often be dramatic. They may be based on birth or result from individual accomplishments. Stratified societies are based on agriculture, industrialism, and information technologies. Most current-day stratified societies are economically organized around market exchange, but in the past, hereditary obligations, dues and rents paid to overlords and landlords, and physical coercion and forced labor played important roles in maintaining social hierarchies. Stratified societies are the most socially complex kinds of societies and are associated with the form of political organization called the state.

Power and Authority

The ability of an individual or institution to cause other people or groups to take actions that they would otherwise prefer not to take is called **power**. Power ultimately derives from the control of resources that people need or desire. For example, professors hold a degree of power in classrooms. They control grades, and because students need and desire good grades, they do things they would probably prefer not to do, such as take quizzes and exams or write papers.

Authority is the ability to cause others to act based on perceived personal characteristics such as honor, status, knowledge, ability, lineage, and/or the holding of formal public office. Authority is often an important aspect of power (Figure 7.1). For example, you may listen to your professors because of their knowledge, their ability to engage students, and the position they hold (their authority) as well as because they control your grade (their power). Similarly, the power of a political office holder may derive from the respect accorded them but also because political offices generally include a coercive ability that comes from control of resources. People without power may have considerable authority. For example, people may respect religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama or the pope and follow some of their teachings even if they are members of different religions. Conversely, people without authority can also hold power. An armed robber certainly has power, but most people do not obey his commands because they respect him or because of the high social position he holds.

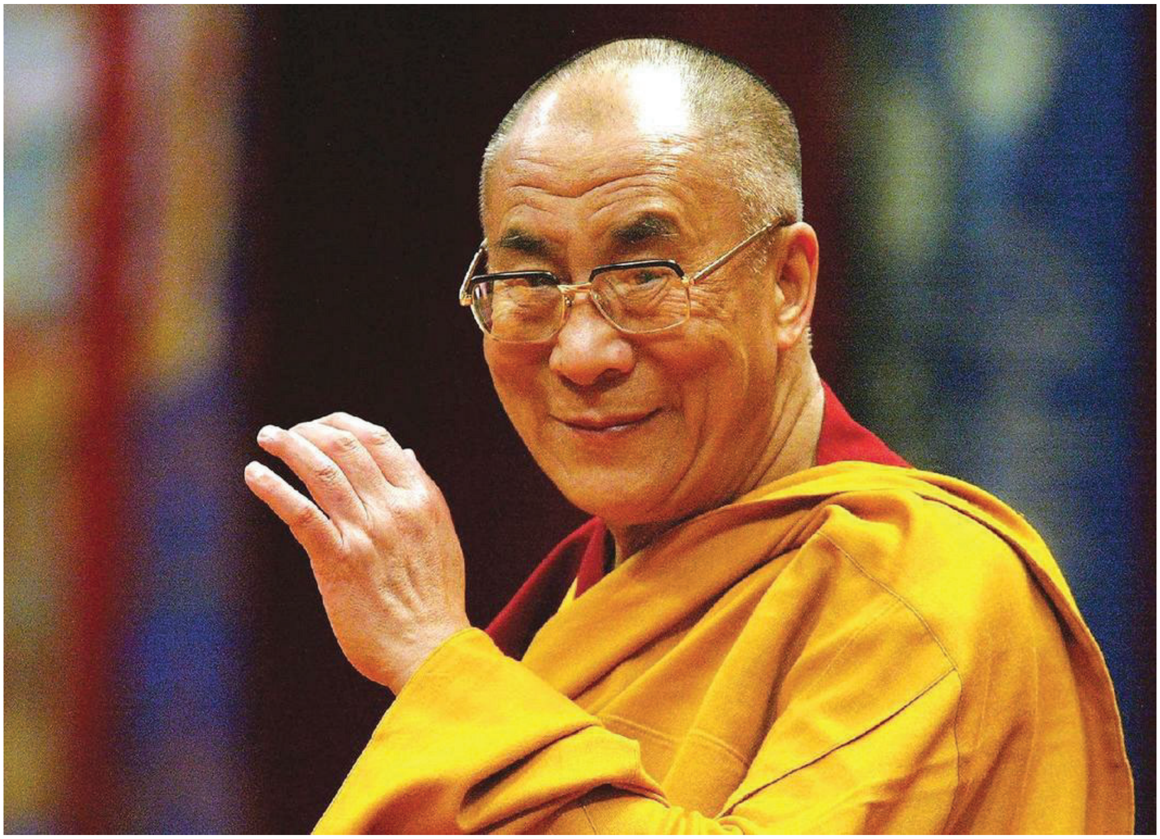


Figure 7.1 Religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama,

seen here, may have great authority derived from the respect people grant them. However, they have little coercive power over most people.

Mark Dadswell/Getty Images

Ideologies

The values and beliefs that legitimize the distribution and uses of power and authority in a specific society make up its **political ideology**. Not everyone in society may agree with a dominant political ideology, and any ideology may be more accepted by those who benefit the most from it than by those who benefit less. When fewer people in a society accept its reigning political ideology, the society may rely on greater use of coercion, and even perhaps violence, to maintain itself. Although political systems differ in how much they rely on coercion, both coercion and consensus contribute to maintaining order in almost all societies.

In the United States, one element of political ideology is the idea that a positive attitude combined with energetic hard work will lead to success, wealth, and power. This idea is found in many places in American culture, from movies and books to graduation speeches and TED talks. It might be best represented by the 19th-century American author Horatio Alger Jr., who wrote more than 100 books and numerous poems, essays, and short stories (Figure 7.2). Alger's books were aimed at male young adult readers, and almost all have similar plots: An impoverished boy gradually gains wealth and power through a combination of honesty, good attitude, hard work, and luck. The Alger model of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps is political because it justifies the existing distribution of wealth and power by implying that the wealthy and powerful have earned their position. This leads to programs and policies designed to encourage behavior like that of Alger's heroes and punish deviance from that behavior, at least among the poor.

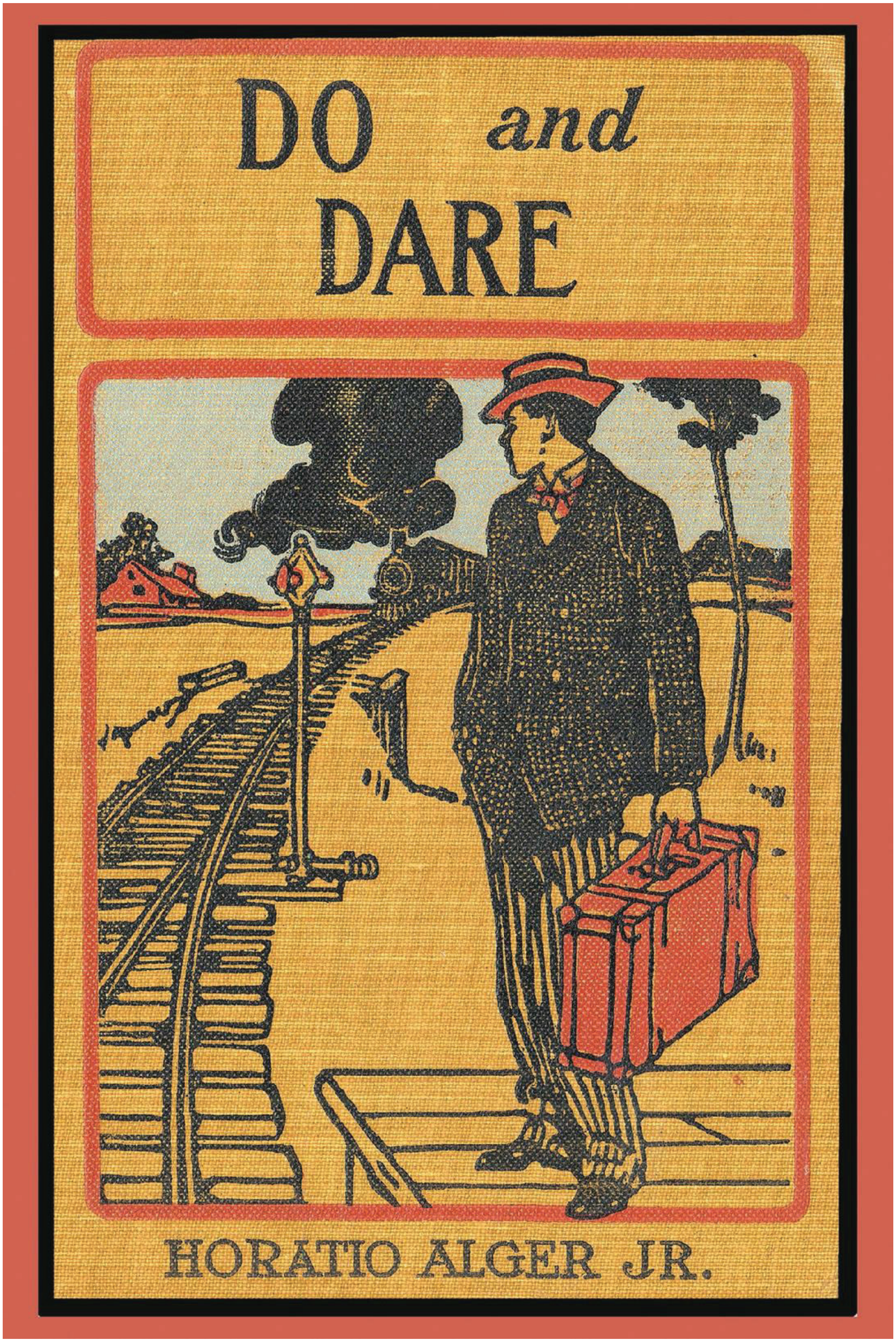

DO and DARE
HORATIO ALGER JR.

Figure 7.2 In the United States, one element of political ideology is the idea that a positive attitude combined with energetic hard work will lead to success, wealth, and power. This was exemplified in books by the best-selling 19th-century author Horatio Alger Jr. The heroes of Alger's books were always young men who succeeded in this way.

Buyenlarge/Getty Images

Polls show that a strong majority of Americans do believe in the importance of both hard work and getting ahead (Pew Research Center, 2019; Gao, 2015). People conform to the political ideology of their society for complex and wide-ranging reasons. They may have a deep and abiding belief in the values the ideology represents. They may expect a short- or long-term benefit from the exercise of power and authority. They may fear the consequences of resistance to power. They may see no practical alternative. They may believe in the worth of their political system despite its failure to return benefits to them.

Contemporary anthropologists are very interested in political processes—how groups and individuals use power and authority to achieve various public goals. These goals may include changing the relationships between groups in society (e.g., between workers and the businesses that employ them), changing the relationship of a group to its environment (e.g., building a road or clearing public land), waging war, making peace, or changing a group’s position in the social hierarchy. Political goals have many motivations. Although by definition, all political behavior affects the public interest, it is not necessarily in the public interest. Groups and individuals may be motivated by personal profit or prestige or by altruism and idealism, although these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In politically complex societies, those in power use various means to establish **hegemony**—that is, an understanding of the world that establishes a close identification between their own goals and those of the larger society.

Formal political institutions are a source of power and authority, but power and authority may also have more informal bases. **Leadership**, or the ability to direct an enterprise or action, may be a function of political office, but it can also be wielded through informal means such as the manipulation of kinship networks, control over the distribution of wealth, or the ability to harness and catalyze discontent or hatred. Vision and charisma, the ability of some leaders to inspire loyalty or enthusiasm, may be a critical part of leadership, as was the case with Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

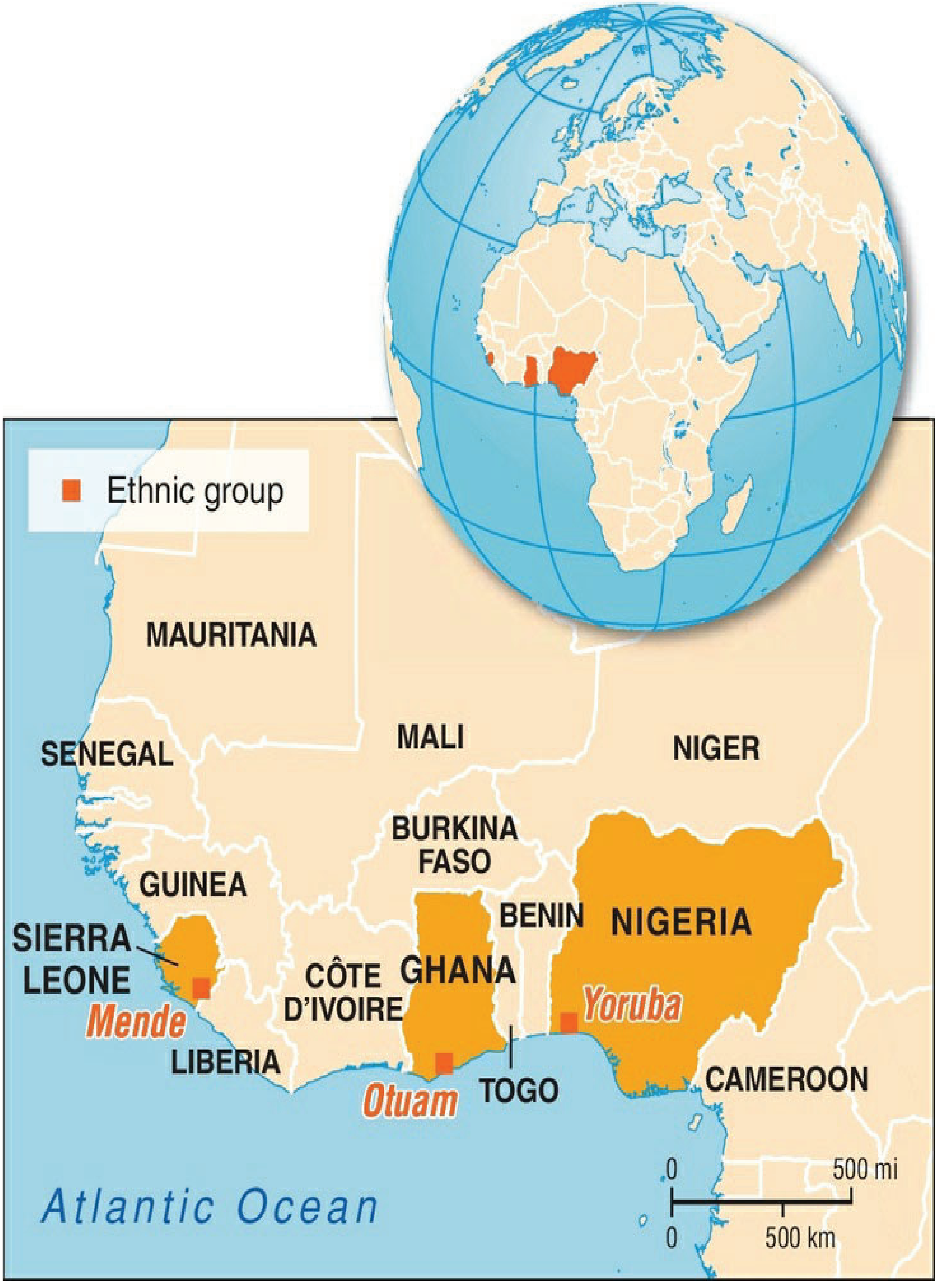
In many small-scale societies, the use of power, authority, decision-making, and the coordination and regulation of human behavior are not formally separated from other aspects of culture; they are embedded in other social institutions such as kinship, economics, and religion. Leadership may be based on an individual's position as the head of a family, lineage, or clan. In regions where supernatural intervention is an important aspect of decision-making (e.g., where to hunt, when to move camp, how to find a thief, who to vote for), individuals with perceived access to spiritual power have important political roles in society.

Politics almost always involves control over the distribution of some goods and services. Power and authority are embedded in economic roles and modes of exchange. Potlatching chiefs on the Northwest Coast of North America and kula trading bigmen of Papua New Guinea, described in Chapter 6, are examples of leaders who hold both economic and political roles.

The connections between economics and politics are clear in complex societies such as our own. For example, Donald Trump appointed Wall Street executives to top roles in his administration, relying particularly on executives from the powerful investment firm Goldman Sachs (Elstein, 2017; Cheng, 2017). Often, the connections between wealth and politics are more subtle, such as when people with great wealth exert their dominance through lobbying and campaign contributions rather than by holding political office. The financial services industry spent $2.9 billion on campaign contributions and lobbying in the 2019–2020 election cycle. About 53% of this went to Democrats and 47% to Republicans. The industry employed more than 2,000 registered lobbyists (Dean, 2021).

Women and Political Power

In small-scale societies, positions of formal political power are often held by men. However, there are some important exceptions, particularly in Africa (Farrar, 1997; Matory, 1994). Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, certain offices were reserved to represent women's interests. Also, in Nigeria, some Igbo groups had a female ruler and a council that paralleled that of the king but was concerned with women's affairs. The Mende in Sierra Leone had women paramount chiefs who were seen as mothers writ large (Hoffer, 1972), that is, they derived their authority and power from the reproductive and supportive roles of women as mothers. The Mende women's secret society, the Sande, was very powerful, reflecting the important economic roles of wives, who were authority figures and who might even succeed a chief in office. One of the most famous Mende women of power was Madam Yoko. Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the changing political status of Sierra Leone in the 19th century, she succeeded her husband in office and was recognized as a paramount chief in 1884 (Hoffer, 1974). Far more recently, Peggielene Bartels (Figure 7.3) was named king of the town of Otuam in Ghana after the death of her uncle. She recently published a book on her experiences (Bartels & Herman, 2012) and has said that an important part of her mission is to empower women.



■ Ethnic group
MAURITANIA
SENEGAL
MALI
NIGER
BURKINA FASO
GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE
BENIN
NIGERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
Yoruba
Mende
LIBERIA
Otuam
TOGO
CAMEROON
Atlantic Ocean
0
500 mi
0
500 km

Description

Map 7.1 Location of the Yoruba and Mende ethnic groups and the town of Otuam.

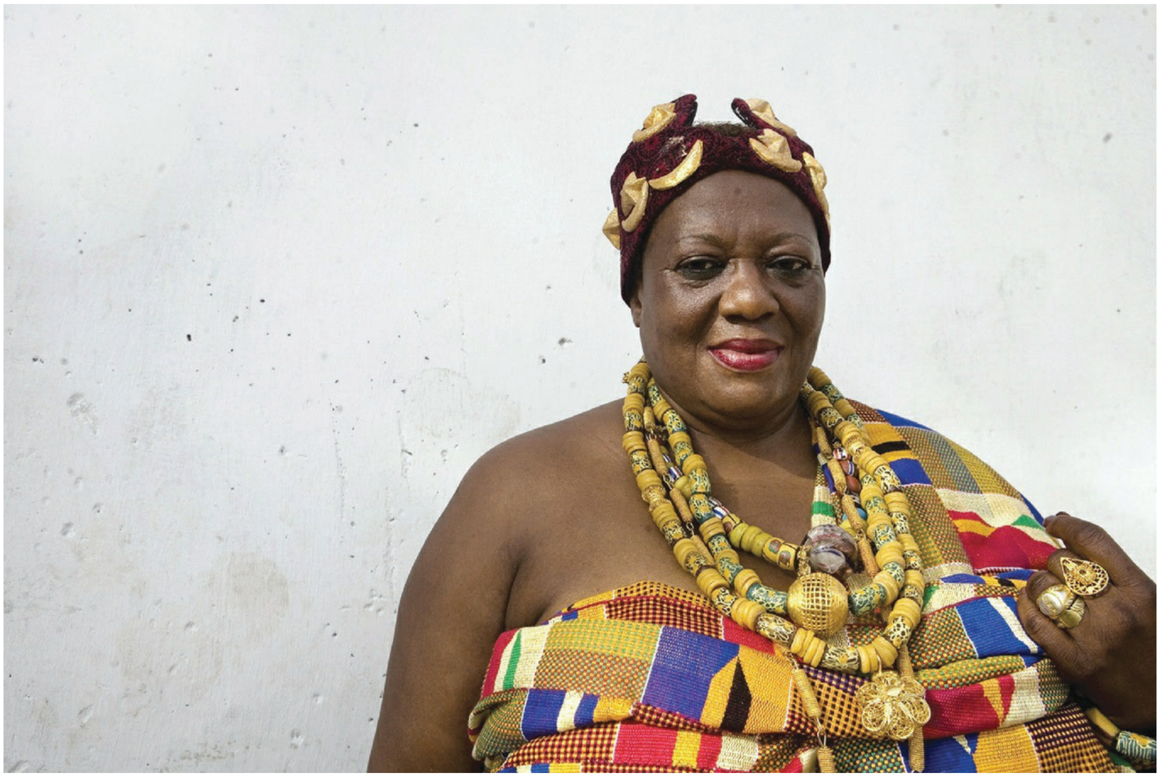


Figure 7.3 Women play important political roles in many groups. Here, Peggielene "Peggy" Bartles, king of the town of Otuam in Ghana stands for an official portrait.

Jane Hahn/Getty Images

Women also have informal sources of power. In some West African communities, for example, women derive power from their control over marketing agricultural and other products (Potash, 1989). In many matrilineal societies, women's power is interwoven with their roles in the kinship, ceremonial, and economic systems.

Punishment of Social Violations

No human society has eternal peace and harmony. Individuals do not always conform to the rules, and they often act in ways that cause conflict and disrupt the social order. Thus, all societies must have means of regulating disputes among their members.

In all societies, people are taught the proper ways for members of their social group to behave from earliest childhood and throughout their lives. In societies organized through kinship and face-to-face social relations, there are rarely formal institutions for inculcating these. However, in more complex societies, particularly states, a broad range of institutions—from schools to religious establishments to courts of law—are involved in teaching and enforcing socially approved ways of behaving. Governments are willing to use force to prevent challenges to at least some socially approved behaviors.

Every society has mechanisms to deal with nonnormative behavior and conflict. In face-to-face communities and informal groups within complex societies, mechanisms such as gossip and ridicule can be effective ways to ensure conformity (Merry, 1981). In a recent study of norm violation in 57 countries, Eriksson et al. (2021) found that the more inappropriate behavior was, the more likely people were to consider gossip an appropriate response. Further, people in wealthier and more individualistic countries used gossip more (relative to social ostracism or violence) than people in poorer countries. This may reflect the absence of strong and at least somewhat reliable police and judiciary systems in many places.

Fear of witchcraft accusations is another informal control mechanism (Evans-Pritchard, 1937/1958; Lemert, 1997). In societies with witchcraft beliefs, when something goes wrong, witchcraft accusations may be directed at people who refuse to observe group norms. The fear of being accused of witchcraft exerts pressure on people to conform.

Small-scale communities also use avoidance to sanction social deviants, and a person shunned by others is at a great psychological and economic disadvantage. In complex societies, avoidance is effective in smaller groups within larger institutions, such as the workplace in an industrial society.

Supernatural sanctions regulate human behavior in almost all societies. A sin is a violation of an important social norm that calls forth punishment by supernatural forces. In the Trobriand Islands, incest is a sin that brings a divinely imposed skin affliction caused by an insect that is spontaneously generated by the taboo sexual act (Malinowski, 1929, p. 504).

In every society, force or the threat of force is applied to those who commit certain offenses. In some situations, the whole community, or some part of it, understands itself and is understood by others as authorized to punish an individual who offends certain social norms. The proximal source of such power is either local consensus or a more powerful political entity. The ultimate source of such power is a vexing question for political philosophers in all traditions.

Societies have numerous mechanisms to resolve conflicts. In large-scale societies such as states, many rules are codified as laws and there are institutions such as courts and prisons. The functions of law belong to separate legal institutions, such as courts. In smaller-scale societies, social regulation is often embedded in religion, kinship, and other institutions.

Systems of adjudication address conflicts that might otherwise disrupt community life. In politically complex societies such as contemporary nation-states, law addresses both crimes against the state and conflicts between individuals. In many cases, the legal system is concerned with determining winners and losers or with determining individual punishment. In structurally simpler societies, disputes are treated as potential threats to society because they have ripple effects throughout the community. Conflict management in egalitarian societies is more often directed at maintaining existing social relationships between families and groups and less at individual responsibility.

Rebellions and Revolutions

The study of political processes emphasizes how power changes hands and how new kinds of political organization and ideologies develop. Political processes are never static. Even very small societies are composed of groups that have different and conflicting interests, so there is always unrest and change. The use of power and authority may stabilize a social order, avoid or resolve conflicts, and promote the general welfare or the special rights and privileges of an elite. However, power and authority may also be used to contest prevailing political ideologies and to change or even destroy existing political systems. Groups or factions within a society, as well as governments themselves, use various means to gain their ends. Some of these, such as elections in the United States, are socially sanctioned; some, such as political assassination and terrorism, are not. But acts that are not socially sanctioned are no less political than those that are.

Conflict and violence do not necessarily destroy social order. In some societies, violence is perceived as a legitimate means of dealing with conflict and solving disputes—for example, blood feuds and legally sanctioned death penalties. Conflict may even support the social order since competition over goals makes those goals seem worth fighting over. Even violent conflict for political office does not necessarily destroy the power or authority of the office being sought as the struggle itself emphasizes that the conflicting groups view the office as politically important. For example, for much of European history, aristocrats fought viciously over the crown. However, in most cases, such fighting reinforced the institution of kingship rather than damaged it.

Much of the conflict within political systems either occurs as part of the normal functioning of the system or as **rebellions** intended to reallocate resources within an existing political structure. **Revolutions**, which are attempts to overthrow the existing political structure and put another type of political structure in its place, are much less common. For example, the failed military coup in Turkey in

2016 was a rebellion. Coup leaders hoped to take over the machinery of the existing Turkish state. The ISIS takeover of a large area of Iraq and Syria in 2014 was revolutionary. ISIS members hoped to overthrow and replace the entire systems of government in those countries.

Anthropologists often identify four ideal types of political organization: bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Typically, bands and tribes are egalitarian societies, chiefdoms are rank societies, and states are stratified societies (Service, 1962).

BAND SOCIETIES

Band organization is typical of foragers. A **band** is a small group of people, usually about 20 to 50, comprising families who live together and are loosely associated with their foraging territory. Generalized or balanced reciprocity dominates economic exchanges in band societies, which tend to be egalitarian. Band societies have few specialized roles and few differences in wealth, prestige, or power. Bands are fairly independent of one another, with few higher levels of social integration or centralized mechanisms of leadership. Band members are typically required to marry outside of their group, and this helps to establish ties among different bands. Ties of descent and marriage link people through both their mother's and father's family. Trading relations also link individuals to other band members. Membership in bands is flexible, and usually, people can change their residence from one band to another with ease. This is particularly adaptive for a foraging way of life and low population density.

Political Integration and Leadership in Band Societies

In most band societies, all members have more or less equal access to resources, and this means that formal leaders with the power to command others are rare. However, there may be many informal leaders: important people with authority. These are usually older men and women whose experience, traditional knowledge, and special skills or success in foraging are sources of prestige. Among some Inuit, the local leader is called “The One to Whom All Listen,” “He Who Thinks,” or “He Who Knows Everything Best” (Hoebel, 1954). Despite these names, leaders must seek consensus and cannot enforce their decisions. They can only persuade and attract others to their leadership based on their past performance.

In foraging bands, sharing and generosity are important values and important sources of respect. Among some whaling Inuit, for example, successful captains who do not generously distribute their accumulated wealth are merely called “rich men” —not a title of great respect. They are distinguished from those whose superior ability and generosity give them far greater prestige and make them leaders in the village.

Conflict Resolution and Violence in Bands

Social order in band societies is usually maintained informally by gossip, ridicule, and avoidance. However, in extreme cases, a person may be killed or driven out of the community. Among the Inuit, supernatural sanctions are an important means of social control (Balikci, 1970). Violations of community norms are considered the result of a form of sickness, and the offender is defined as a patient rather than a criminal. They may be cured through a ritual such as a public confession directed by a shaman. In this ritual, the individual is led to confess all the taboos they have violated. The local villagers form the audience and participate as a background chorus. These confessions are mainly voluntary, although a forceful shaman may denounce a member of the community they feel has engaged in acts repulsive to the spirits and therefore dangerous to the whole group.

If warfare is defined as (1) formally organized and culturally recognized patterns of collective violence against another society or as (2) organized violence between segments within a larger society, then band societies do not have warfare. They lack the strong formal leadership that warfare usually requires. There is generally no formal organization for war, no position of warrior, little or no production for war, and no cultural or social support for sustained armed conflict.

Lack of sustained warfare, however, is not the same as lack of violence. Members of band societies do often fight with each other. When they do so, the objectives are personal, and fighting takes place in short skirmishes. The Ju/’hoansi, for example, do not engage in collective violence against other groups, but men frequently fight, mostly over women, and these fights can result in death (R. Lee, 2003).

Because quarrels and conflicts between individuals may disrupt the group, band societies have developed social mechanisms to inhibit conflict from spreading. Flexible band membership is one such mechanism. Among the Mbuti of the Ituri Forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Figure 7.4), for example, bands regularly break up into smaller units and re-form into larger ones throughout the year. Breaking the band down into smaller units separates people who have been in conflict with one another, thus preventing prolonged hostilities (Turnbull, 1968).

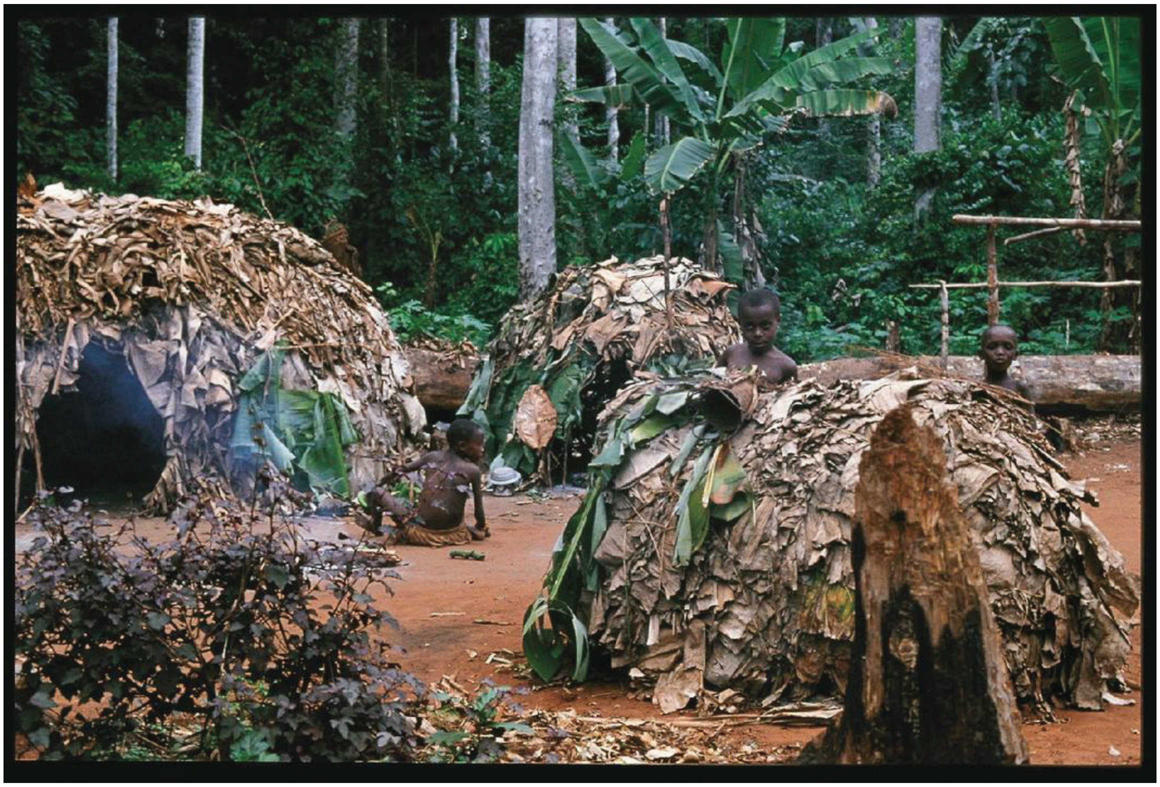


Figure 7.4 Foraging bands are extremely flexible. They frequently solve disputes simply by moving away from each other. A Mbuti band’s camp in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is shown in this picture.

Veronique DURRUTY/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

In Inuit bands, disputes are sometimes resolved through public contests that involve physical activity, such as head butting or boxing, or verbal contests, such as song duels. Here, the weapons are words —“little, sharp words like the wooden splinters which I hack off with my ax” (Hoebel, 1974, p. 93). Song duels can serve a variety of purposes in conflict resolution. In these duels, participants use wit, irony, and satire to accuse and criticize one another. Song duels can also be used to declare brotherhood and even, in some cases, to avenge a murder. When songs are used to accuse and defend, each singer contrasts his modesty and exemplary behavior with the bad character and uncooperative behavior of his opponent. Participants exchange insults and ridicule each other but may not show anger. Winners of song duels are determined by audience response. Although winning a song duel is not based on the facts of the conflict, it does resolve the quarrel and restore normal relations between the hostile parties. Eckert and Newmark say that song duels reconcile “within a ritual framework, the contradictory forces and ambiguities … central to Eskimo life” (1980, p. 191). Girard et al. (2018, p. 29) call it “a restorative practice that released tension and re-established a communal equilibrium.”

When band societies encounter technologically and culturally dominant groups, bands tend to retreat and isolate themselves in marginal areas rather than fight. As a result, most band societies are found on land unsuitable for premodern forms of gardening or agriculture. However, bands may also form trading relations with their neighbors, often exchanging goods such as honey and meat for agricultural products.

TRIBAL SOCIETIES

A **tribe** is a culturally distinct population whose members understand themselves as descended from the same ancestor or as part of the same people. Tribes are found primarily among pastoralists and horticulturists. Their characteristic economic institutions are reciprocity and redistribution, although, as part of larger states, they may also participate in market systems. Like bands, tribes are egalitarian, with few important differences among members in wealth, status, and power. Also, like bands, most tribes do not have distinct or centralized political institutions or roles. Power and social control are embedded in kinship, religion, or other cultural institutions.

Tribes are usually organized into kin groups, which are the units of political activity and control the economic resources necessary for survival. The emergence of kin groups larger than the nuclear family is consistent with both the higher populations of horticultural and pastoral societies and their greater need for coordinated labor. The effective political unit in tribal societies may shift depending on the issues and problems they confront. Most of the time, the local units of a tribe operate independently. In some societies, such as the Nuer or the Yanomamö, the local units may be in a state of ongoing violent conflict among themselves. A higher-level unity among tribal segments most often occurs in response to the threat of attack from another society or the opportunity to make such an attack.

Political Integration and Leadership in Tribes

The local segments of a tribal society are integrated in various ways. Age and sex may be the basis of organized groups of individuals who move through life's stages together. Cross-cultural comparison of societies in which such age groups are an important basis of organization suggests that they are associated with frequent warfare and unstable local groups. Where men cannot rely on their kin as allies in warfare because their kin may not be nearby, age groupings provide a more dependable source of allies (Ritter, 1980). Age groupings may also provide a counter to overdependence on kin, allowing political integration at levels higher than family (Lienard, 2016).

Age grades among the Maasai are one example of this type of tribal integration. In this herding society of Kenya and Tanzania, males follow a well-ordered progression through a series of age grades. Entry into each grade requires a formalized rite of passage. A new age grade is opened for recruitment for groups of boys every 14 years. After childhood, a ceremony called *Enkipaata* initiates the boys as warriors. Warriorhood is a period of training in social, political, and military skills, and it is traditionally geared to warfare and cattle raiding. About 8 years later, a second ceremony, *Eunoto*, marks their transition to less active senior warriors, a stage during which they can marry. Finally, the original age grade moves to eldership at about age 35 in another great ceremony called *Olng'esherr* (UNESCO, n.d.; Figure 7.5).

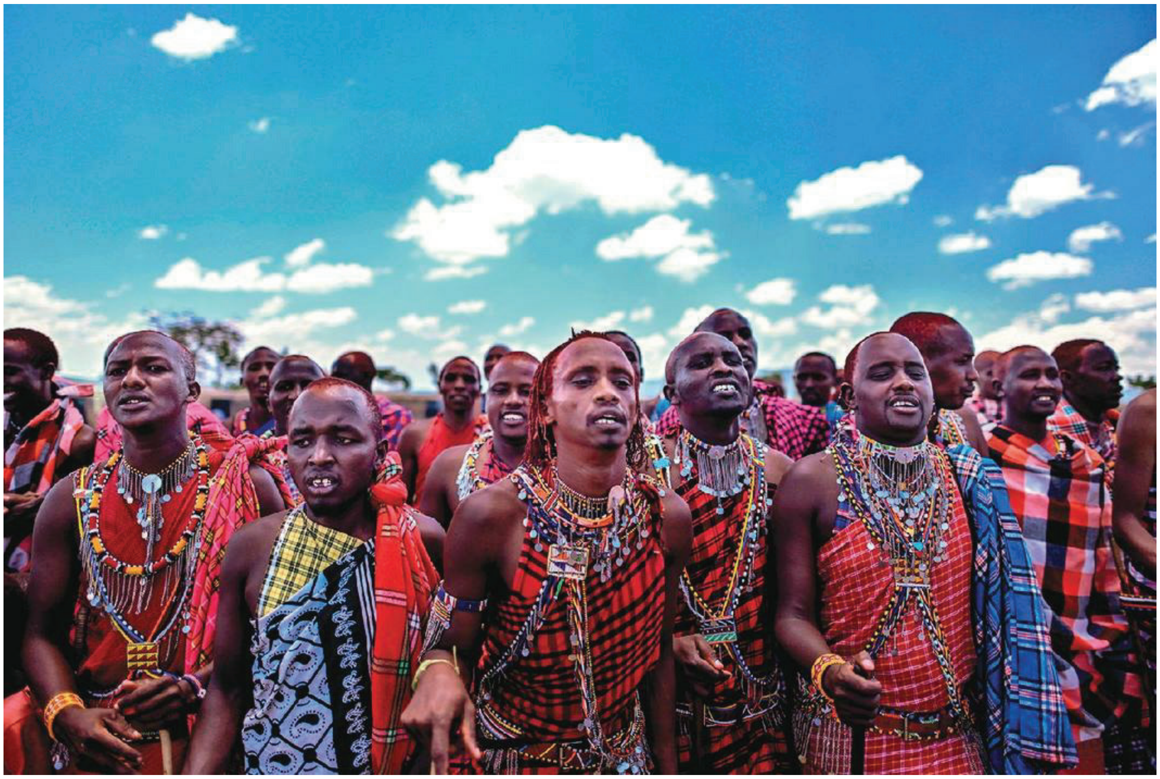


Figure 7.5 Among the Maasai men progress through a series of age grades. Entry into each grade requires a formal rite of passage. Here, Maasai men celebrate the *Olng'ashe*r, the ceremony that marks the transition from senior warrior to eldership.

TONY KARUMBA/AFP via Getty Images

Maasai age-mates are a cohesive group. They provide reciprocal hospitality when they visit each other's villages, expressing a warm and intimate relationship. Age-grade ceremonies periodically bring together Maasai from different sections of the tribe. These gatherings renew their shared identity and sense of unity and cooperation and confirm a system of leadership under age-grade spokesmen. This lends political coherence to people who live dispersed from one another and have no centralized government (Saitoti, 1986).

In addition to age grades, other associations cut across and thus integrate the local segments of a tribe. Examples of these are military societies among some Plains Indian tribes in North America, secret societies that are found in West Africa (such as Poro society for males and Sande society for females), and social structures such as the segmentary lineage system described in Chapter 9.

Tribal societies have leaders but no centralized government and few positions of authority. Many Native American societies had different kinds of leaders for different kinds of activities. The Cheyenne had war leaders and peace leaders. The Ojibwa had many kinds of leaders, including spiritual leaders, hunt leaders, war chiefs, and civil chiefs (Figure 7.6). Women often took leadership roles. Among the Cheyenne, leadership was frequently temporary. People were only leaders for as long as leadership was needed for a specific task or occasion (Flocken, 2013).

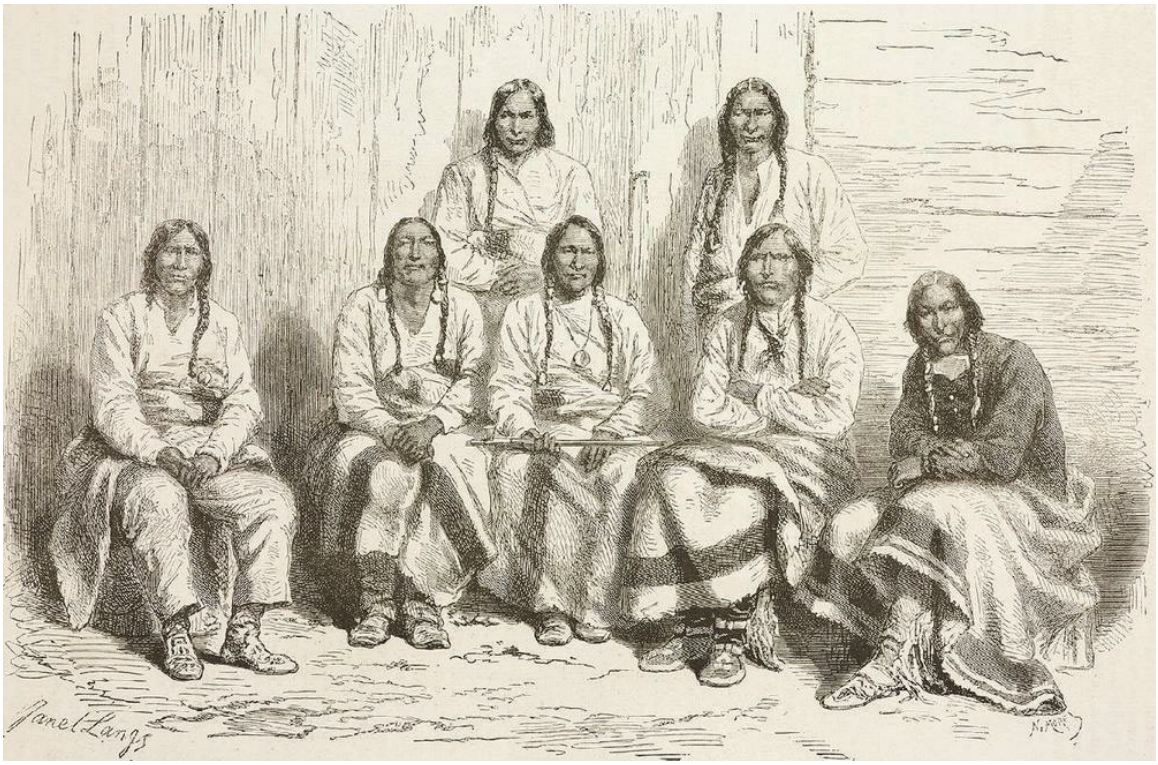


Figure 7.6 Many Native American societies had different kinds of leaders. This 19th-century drawing shows the seven great Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs who came to Denver in 1863 to negotiate with the governor of

Colorado,

DEA/BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA/Getty Images

Europeans who first encountered groups such as the Ojibwa often misinterpreted their political system. The Europeans came from societies with strong centralized leadership and expected other societies to be organized similarly. Therefore, they imposed the concept of a single supreme leader on many societies that did not have such leaders. When the Canadian government insisted that the Ojibwa must have a chief, the Ojibwa appointed one and coined a native word, *okimakkan*, best translated as “fake chief,” to describe him. They refused to accord him any special respect (Hockett, 1973, p. 148).

The bigman is another kind of tribal leader. A **bigman** is a self-made leader who gains power and authority through personal achievements rather than through holding a specific established office (Figure 7.7). Bigmen are common in Pacific Island societies but are found in many other places as well. A bigman begins his career as the leader of a small kin group. Through a series of public actions such as generous loans, the bigman attracts followers. He skillfully builds his capital and increases his number of wives. In many Pacific Island societies, pigs are a major source of wealth. Because, in these societies, usually women take care of pigs, a polygynous bigman can increase the size of his pig herds. He distributes his wealth in ways that build his reputation as a rich and generous man: sponsoring feasts, paying subsidies to military allies, purchasing high ranks in secret societies, and paying the bridewealth of young men seeking wives. By giving generously, the bigman places many other people in debt to him. Bigmen command obedience from their followers through this personal relationship of gratitude and obligation.

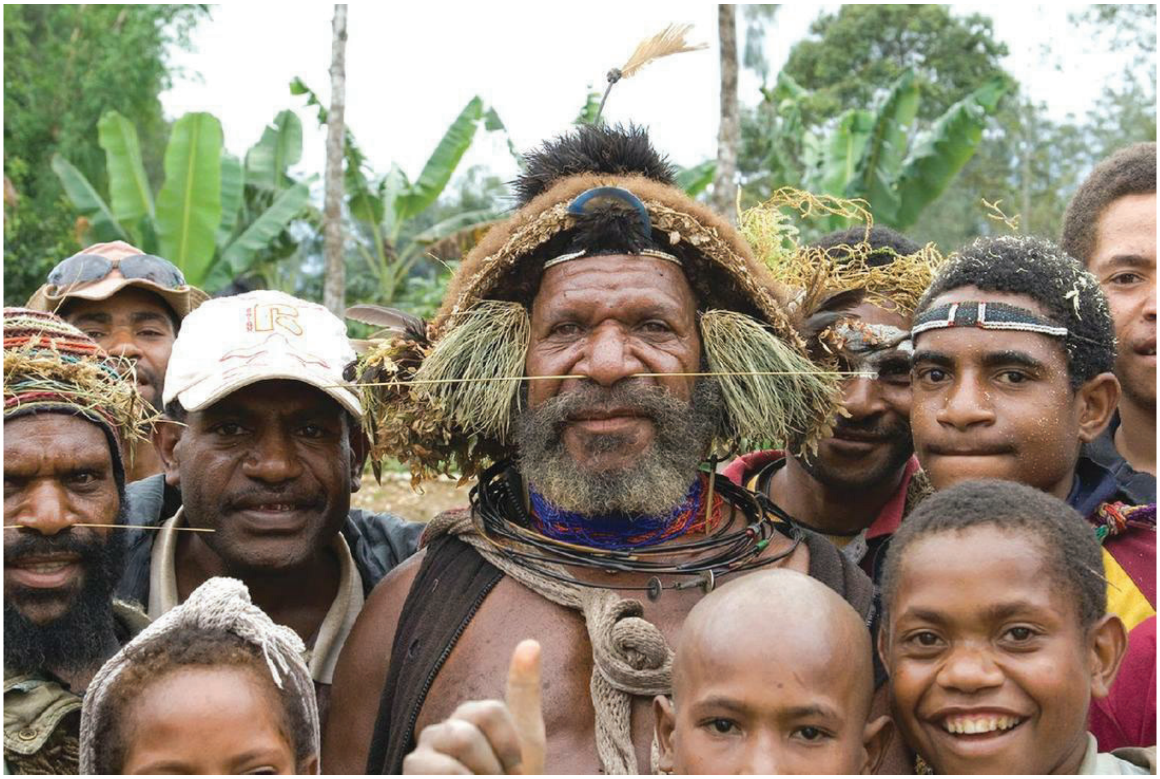


Figure 7.7 A bigman is a self-made leader who gains power and authority through personal achievements rather than through holding an established office. The photo shows a bigman from the Huli people of the highlands of Papua New Guinea.

Edward Reeves/Alamy Stock Photo

A bigman's activities provide leadership above the local level, but bigmen are a fragile mechanism of tribal integration. Bigman systems do not involve the creation of permanent offices but depend on the personality and constant striving of individuals. Bigmen rise and fall. And they cannot pass on their status. With their deaths, their followings usually dissolve. Most important, the bigman must spur his local group on to ever-greater production if he is to hold his own against other tribal bigmen. To maintain prestige, he must give his competitors more than they can give him. The demand to give ever-increasing gifts to competitors means bigmen must begin to withhold gifts from their followers. The resulting discontent may lead to defection among followers or even to the murder of the bigman.

Conflict Resolution and Violence in Tribes

Tribes, like bands, depend mainly on informal mechanisms for controlling deviant behavior and settling conflicts, but they also have more formal mechanisms of control. Among the Cheyenne, for example, formal social control mechanisms came into play during the summer season when the bands came together for communal buffalo hunts and tribal ceremonies. On the buffalo hunt, strict discipline was required because an individual hunter could ruin the hunt for others by alarming and scattering the buffalo. The tribal gatherings and communal hunts were policed by members of military associations. These associations not only punished offenders but also tried to rehabilitate them and bring them back within the tribal structure. People were punished in various ways: Their tepees might have been ripped to shreds, or the ears of their horses cut off, which was a mark of shame. Offenders might have been whipped or killed on the spot if they resisted punishment. However, if an offender accepted the punishment and appeared to have learned a lesson, they were accepted back into the group and their belongings were often replaced. The Cheyenne military societies operated only during the hunt period. At other times, more informal sanctions and leadership operated at the band level (Llewellyn et al., 1941).

In many tribal societies, conflicts between parties with ongoing relationships are resolved by **mediation**, a way of managing disputes that uses the offices of a third party to achieve voluntary agreement between opposing parties. Mediation resolves disputes so that social relationships between the disputants are maintained and harmony is restored to the social order. Among the Kpelle of Liberia, conflict between individuals is addressed by a moot, a form of mediation that takes place before an assembled group of kinsmen and neighbors. After an opening ritual, the mediator reminds the audience of its common interests and unity. The two disputing parties may question each other directly, but the mediator or others may interrupt with questions. After everyone has been heard, the mediator proposes a solution to the conflict that expresses the consensus of the disputing parties and the audience. The party found to be at fault apologizes to the other party and a ritual distribution of food and drink again unites the group. In concluding, the mediator again stresses the importance of the restoration of community harmony. Through the moot, reconciliation is achieved with a minimum of resentment, so that conflicts do not continue and disrupt the social order (Gibbs, 1963).

The kava-drinking circle in the Pacific Island Kingdom of Tonga is another example of a community-oriented mechanism for dispute resolution. Kava is an indigenous alcoholic drink often consumed in ritual contexts throughout Oceania. In Tonga, drinking kava is a semi-ritualized male activity that serves as a nonviolent alternative to alcohol-drinking events. The kava circle is an informal social context in which the status distinctions, otherwise so important in Tonga, are dissolved, and men air their grievances and reconcile their differences in an atmosphere of social camaraderie (Pop, 2014).

The principles of the West African moot, the kava circle in Tonga, and other nonadversarial conflict management systems have been widely incorporated into the U.S. legal system. Most formal legal dispute resolution in the United States operates through courts in which two sides appear as adversaries and present opposing arguments to judge and jury. In many cases, this system is necessary, but it is slow and expensive, and disputants are often dissatisfied with the results. Mediation is increasingly used to resolve many kinds of disputes, especially when the disputants are in long-term relationships. Such disputes include divorce proceedings, minor civil disputes, and conflicts in schools, housing projects, neighborhoods, the workplace, and even international disputes between nations.

Compared to band societies, tribal societies experience a high degree of warfare. Anthropologists have proposed numerous explanations for this fact. One explanation is based on ecology and argues that warfare is one of the mechanisms through which tribal societies balance population with resources. For example, Rappaport (1984) famously argued that among the Tsembaga of the New Guinea

Highlands, warfare was a critical element of a complex system that controlled the relationships between land, agriculture, pig raising, and the human population. In this system, ritual served as a type of control mechanism, turning on and off cycles of pig consumption, warfare, and land expansion. The effect of the entire system was to keep the Tsembaga and other groups around them in balance with their environment. Warfare is then one way for societies to expand when they are experiencing a population increase or have reached the limits of expansion into unoccupied land (Vayda, 1976). But warfare is not inevitable. When there are other effective ways for distributing population, such as expansion into unoccupied land, tribes may not engage in war.

Another explanation focuses on social structure. Many tribes that conduct warfare are patrilineal and patrilocal. This structure promotes male solidarity and makes the use of force in resolving local conflicts more feasible than in matrilineal, matrilocal societies, which emphasize solidarity among women. However, matrilineal societies such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy did carry out warfare over long distances (Ember & Ember, 1971).

It is also important to note that the economic structure of many tribal societies may be conducive to warfare. In many of these societies, bigmen compete for prestige with members of their group and members of other groups. Bigmen use their own hard work and their skills of organization and persuasion to get their followers to engage in high levels of production. They often use the results to engage in feasts where they display their generosity and demand prestige from those they have invited. Tensions in such competitive feasts are often high. Guests are placed in the position of granting prestige to their hosts, responding with an even more generous feast, or violence. It is important to note that the combination of hard work, organizational ability, and charisma that helps to make one a bigman may also make one a great war leader. The ability to achieve prestige through generosity and feasting parallels the ability to achieve prestige through violence. Thus, in some cases, tribes may fight because they are involved in a system that generates the competitive passions, organizational skills, and leadership talents conducive to warfare.

The Yanomamö of the Amazon areas of Venezuela and Brazil are one of the most famous examples of violence and warfare in anthropology, well known for their high level of personal violence and frequent warfare (Figure 7.8). Napoleon Chagnon studied the Yanomamö starting in the 1960s. He viewed violence as central to Yanomamö culture. Chagnon offers several explanations for ongoing Yanomamö warfare and violence, including the preservation of village autonomy and competition among males for access to women (Chagnon, 1988, 1997). A related view is that violence serves to create strategic alliances among unrelated men who will eventually marry into each other’s families and form new village units (Macfarlan et al., 2014).

Figure 7.8 Warfare plays an important role in many tribal societies. Anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon saw violence and warfare as central to Yanomamo culture. Here, a Yanomamo man raises an ax in a ceremonial threat to a visitor arriving from another Yanamomo village.

DeAgostini/Getty Images

Another view of Yanomamö violence and warfare is that it helps control population, not by causing deaths in battles but indirectly through female infanticide (Divale & Harris, 1976). In societies with constant warfare, there is a cultural preference for male children who can become fierce and aggressive warriors. Because male children are preferred over females, they are treated better and are more likely to survive childhood. Additionally, some female infants may be killed outright—victims of female infanticide. These practices result in a shortage of women and strong conscious motivation for warfare: The Yanomamö say they fight for women. In a Yanomamö raid on another village, as many women as possible are captured.

However, other anthropologists challenge the idea that warfare is a core feature of Yanomamö society. For example, Ferguson (1995) has argued that the extreme Yanomamö violence Chagnon documented in the 1960s was precipitated by the movement of outside missionaries into previously isolated areas. These outsiders brought goods that were highly desired by the Yanomamö, and because of this, the Yanomamö moved their settlements to be close to government outposts and missionary stations. However, this had a series of grave consequences. With higher population densities, game was depleted, resulting in the breakdown of norms of reciprocity and leading to increased conflict within villages. The outsiders brought disease, which drastically reduced the population. Competition for manufactured goods brought men increasingly into conflict, and because these goods included firearms, the conflict was more often fatal. The declining population made marriages more difficult to negotiate. All these factors led to increased fighting that in turn reinforced the low status of Yanomamö women and helped further male violence against them, perpetuating the cycle of female infanticide, shortage of women, and raids for women. Thus, for Ferguson, rather than being a core feature of Yanomamö society, violence was the result of outside influences.

Still other analyses suggest that the analyses of Yanomamö violence tell us more about the anthropologists than about the Yanomamö. Coello de la Rosa (2018), for example, argues that discussions of Yanomamö violence must be situated in the context of the Vietnam War, the Cold War, decolonization, and neoliberalism. Although the Yanomamö did have a clear record of violence in the 20th century, interest in them and explanations of their violence had more to do with American and European debates about human nature than about Yanomamö culture.

These analyses point to a critical aspect of anthropological explanation. Anthropologists always bring their own interests to their research and writing. Moreover, a wide variety of factors, such as ecology, social structure, and economy, may help create the preconditions for violence among the Yanomamö or other groups. However, these factors alone can rarely provide sufficient explanation. Warfare happens in the context of specific events such as the advance of missionary outposts into Yanomamö territory or the rise and fall of specific bigmen leaders. The structure and ecology of societies like the Yanomamö probably make some level of violence inevitable. But how much violence will occur, when it will happen, and the forms that it will take depend on the specific history of a specific people at a specific place and time.

CHIEFDOMS

Although the idea of the chiefdom has a long history in anthropology, the term is used less consistently than band, tribe, or state. Some anthropologists argue that it encompasses such a diverse group of societies that lumping them together obscures more than it clarifies

(Earle, 1987). Nevertheless, the term *chiefdom* is still useful if we keep in mind that ideal types such as tribe and chiefdom are theoretical devices, and reality is much more diverse than any classification system.

Robert Carneiro (1981, p. 45) defined the **chiefdom** as “an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief.” Carneiro holds that chiefdoms are critically important because they were the societies in which people first surrendered their political autonomy to leaders from other villages, thereby creating a society with multiple levels of political authority.

Political Integration and Leadership in Chiefdoms

While tribes consist of structurally and functionally similar segments (lineages and villages, for example), a chiefdom is made up of parts that are structurally and functionally different from one another and are integrated into a larger political organization. Chiefdoms are found mainly among cultivators and pastoralists, as well as the few foraging societies where food resources are unusually plentiful, such as the groups of the Northwest Coast of North America.

Although chiefdoms, like tribes, are organized through kinship, there is one important difference: Tribes have no centralized government, but chiefdoms have centralized leadership—the political office of the chief. This office is usually inherited and is sustained by religious authority. Chiefdoms often keep lengthy genealogical records of the names and acts of specific chiefs, which are used to verify claims to rank and chiefly title.

In most cases, the rise of a governing center is related to a redistributive exchange pattern in which goods move from the producers to the chief and are then redistributed by them in the form of offices, benefits, and other payments as well as feasts and rituals.

How production is moved to the chief may vary. In some cases, gifts are made to the chief; in others, socially accepted norms require payments to the chief, but chiefs may also make demands for tribute and be willing to enforce these demands with violence (Wolf, 1982, p. 80).

Chiefdoms vary in the equity with which goods and wealth are redistributed. In some chiefdoms, a reputation for generosity helps the leader retain power, and thus most people receive benefits. In other cases, redistributions occur relatively infrequently or are limited to key supporters of the chief. Populations might be controlled by consensus, but coercion and despotism are often employed as well (Earle, 1987). The demands for food and other goods by the chief usually lead to a higher level of organization and productivity than is found in tribes.

Chiefdoms are ranked societies. Certain lineages and some people in them have higher social status than others, and these statuses are inherited. For example, among the Nootka, who live on the Northwest Coast of North America, individuals held rights to manage all economic resources, such as fishing, hunting, and gathering grounds. Inheritance of property rights passed only through the line of the eldest son. This was also true for the inheritance of the office of chief. The position of younger sons was lower than that of eldest sons, and this difference in rank was typically expressed in terms of wealth. Although such wealth consisted partly of important economic resources, it was also symbolic, such as the right to use special names, perform certain ceremonial functions, sponsor potlatches, and wear certain items of clothing and decoration. For example, only chiefs could wear abalone shell jewelry and sea otter fur on their robes. The right to direct the use of economic resources supported the symbolic ranking system. The chief of a kin group received resources that formally acknowledged his rank, such as the first of the salmon catch, the best parts of sea mammals that had been killed, blankets, and furs. The chief could use these resources to sponsor a potlatch, at which most of these goods were given away (Drucker, 1951; Rosman & Rubel, 1986).

Some of the most complex chiefdoms were found in Polynesia (Figure 7.9). In Tahiti, society was divided into the *ari'i*, who were the immediate families of the chiefs of the most important lineages in the larger districts; the *ra'atira*, who were the heads of less important lineages and their families; and the *manahune*, which included the remainder of the population. These ranks had economic, political, and religious aspects. All people possessed *mana*, a spiritual power, but in different degrees depending on rank. The *ari'i* had the most *mana* because they were closest to the ancestral gods, who were the source of *mana*. Elaborate taboos separated those with more *mana* from those with less and regulated social relations among the three ranks. For example, higher-ranked people could not eat with those of lower rank. Because men had higher rank than women and children, they could not eat together. The highest-ranking *ari'i* were so sacred that anything they touched became poison for those below them. In some Polynesian islands, the highest chief was kept completely away from other people and even used a special vocabulary that was forbidden to others (Claessen & Van Bakel, 2006).

Figure 7.9 Chiefdoms are ranked, hierarchical societies. Here, Makirau Haurua is invested with the title of Teurukura Ariki, or supreme chief of Aitutaki, in the Cook Islands in the South Pacific.

Marco Pompeo Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

Chiefdoms are also frequently found among pastoral nomads, such as the Basseri of Iran. To avoid exhaustive grazing of an area, famine of the flocks, and intertribal fighting, nomads such as the Basseri stick to fixed migration schedules and routes. Thus, an important role of the chief is to coordinate movements of the tribe and conduct relations with outsiders through whose territories the tribe must move (Barth, 1964).

Conflict Resolution and Violence in Chiefdoms

Internal violence within chiefdoms is lower than in tribes because the chief has the authority to make judgments, punish deviant individuals, and resolve disputes. Some of the chief's power is material: Chiefs may impose fines, confiscate property, and, on occasion, have people killed. However, in many cases, part of the chief's power is magical. For example, in the Trobriand Islands, the power of a chief to punish people is achieved partly by hiring sorcerers to kill the offender by magic. The greatest power of the Trobriand chief lies in his control of garden magic. As a garden magician, he not only organizes the efforts of the villagers under his control but also performs the rituals considered necessary for success at every step of gardening. The ultimate power of the Trobriand chief is his magical control of rain: He is believed to be able to produce a prolonged drought, which will cause many people to starve. This power is used when the chief is angry as a means of collective punishment and enforcement of his will (Malinowski, 1935).

Social order in chiefdoms is maintained through both fear and consensus. Often people have genuine respect for and loyalty to the chief. However, the chief's power is backed by his control of symbolic, supernatural, administrative, economic, and military force. This power offers a source of stability absent in tribes. However, violence does occur both between and within chiefdoms. The organizing power of chiefs makes them better able to maintain peace within society but also better able to pursue war with others. Because chiefs are more likely to have both high prestige and wealth than tribal leaders, violent competition for the office of chief sometimes occurs. Chiefs generally suppress any attempt at rebellion or threats from competitors and deal harshly with those who try to take their power. Offenses against a chief are often punished by death.

STATE SOCIETIES

A **state** is a hierarchical form of political organization in which a central government has a monopoly over the use of force. Unlike chiefdoms, where ranking is based on kinship, kinship ties in states do not extend throughout the whole society, nor does kinship regulate relations between the different social classes.

In states, many different groups are incorporated into society. States partially disconnect the idea of membership from marriage, blood, and ethnicity. Thus, the state can expand, incorporating different linguistic, ethnic, religious, and social groups without splitting. These groups may have different rights within the state. For example, many states have included large groups of enslaved people. Because of their ability to encompass diverse people, states can become much more populous, heterogeneous, and powerful than any other kind of political organization.

The Rise of State Societies

State societies are associated with the abilities to organize large populations for collective and coordinated action, suppress internal disorder through a monopoly over the use of force, and defend against external threats. More than any other form of political organization, the state can carry out military action for both offensive and defensive purposes.

The origin of the state, one of humankind's most significant cultural achievements, cannot be explained by any one theory. States are formed as a result of various interrelated events feeding back on one another in complex ways. Prestate societies respond to different selective pressures with many tactics, including changing some of their internal structures, subduing competing groups, and establishing themselves as dominant in a region. These internal shifts set off chain reactions that can lead to state formation. Some states emerged as cultural solutions to problems that demanded highly centralized coordination and regulation of human populations (Cohen & Service, 1978; Fried, 1967). Other states emerged because of particular historical or ecological conditions, such as the shift from rainfall to irrigation farming, and still others, like the Asante (see this chapter's "Ethnography" section; Figure 7.10), emerged out of military triumph.

Figure 7.10 Asantehene Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II and his court in Kumasi, Ghana.

Chris Jackson/Getty Images

Carneiro (1970) emphasizes the importance of ecology in state formation. He argues that states may emerge when agricultural land is limited and the population is expanding. This seems to have occurred in pre-Columbian Peru, where independent farming villages were confined to narrow valleys bounded by the sea, desert, or mountains. As the population grew, villages split, and populations dispersed until all the available land was used. At this point, more intensive methods of agriculture were applied to land already being farmed, and previously unusable land was brought under cultivation by terracing and irrigation. As the population continued to increase, pressure for land intensified, resulting in war. Because of the constraints of the environment, villages that lost wars had nowhere to go and had to accept a politically subordinate role to remain on their land. As more villages were subjugated, the political organization of the area became more complex, and chiefdoms developed. The warring units were now larger, and as conquest of larger areas continued, centralization of authority increased. Finally, the entire area was brought under the control of one chief. The next step was the conquest of weaker valley chiefdoms by stronger ones until powerful empires emerged, most notably that of the Inca (Bauer & Covey, 2002; Figure 7.11).

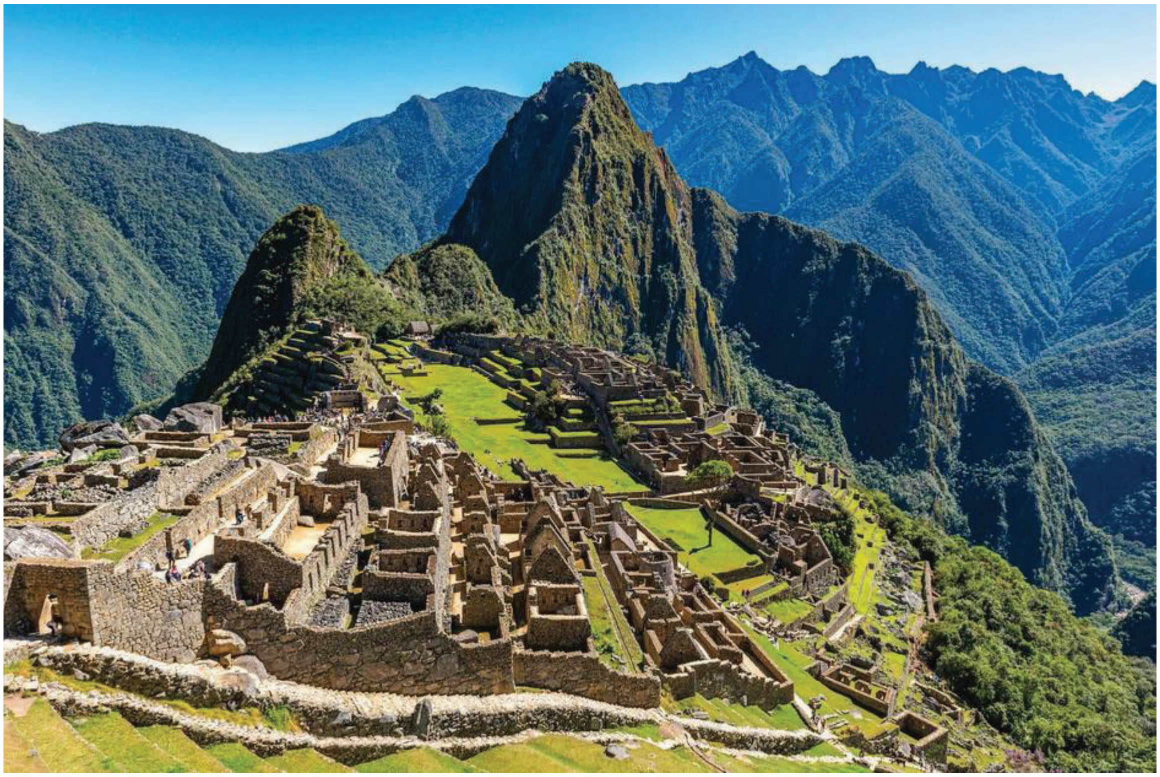


Figure 7.11 Machu Picchu, perhaps the most famous Inca archaeological site, may have been a ritual center or a retreat for Inca elites.

iStockphoto.com/PRImageFactory

Most theories of state formation tend to emphasize either conflict (Fried, 1967) or integration and function (Service, 1971). Conflict theories tend to emphasize the emergence of the state as directly connected with the emergence of an elite class that protects its power and privileges through coercion and the management of political ideology. Functionalist theories emphasize the benefits of the state to its members. States, they argue, are beneficial because they can provide the stability needed for growth and technological development, effective mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes, protection of trade and finance, and defense against external enemies. They also possess the ability to expand.

Political Integration and Leadership in State Societies

States are characterized by a centralized government, an interrelated set of status and power roles that become at least partially separate from other aspects of social organization, such as kinship and religion. In state societies, the idea of territory becomes central, and individuals belong to the state primarily as a result of the location of their residence or birth. The administrative divisions of a state are territorial units, cities, districts, and so on. Each unit has its own government, which is, in turn, subject to the central government.

In state societies, the government emerges as a social institution specifically concerned with making and enforcing public policy. For example, the state intervenes in the economic process. It sets the legal framework in which economic exchange takes place. It may tax production and consumption, control the conditions of labor, and use vast numbers of people in bureaucracies, armies, and state-controlled enterprises. The state also intervenes in the exchange and distribution of goods and services through complex market networks. It protects these networks by making travel safe for traders and by keeping peace in the marketplace. The state also intervenes in the consumption process, outlawing certain kinds of purchases. Historically, states often had sumptuary laws that limited the consumption of certain luxuries to specific classes of people. Such laws were intended to preserve and reinforce the social order and were often quite specific. For example, in 1574, Queen Elizabeth I of England commanded,

> None shall wear in his apparel any silk of the color of purple, cloth of gold tissued, nor fur of sables, but only the King, Queen, King’s mother, children, brethren, and sisters, uncles and aunts; and except dukes, marquises, and earls, who may wear the same in doublets, jerkins, linings of cloaks, gowns, and hose; and those of the Garter, purple in mantles only. (Quoted in Aughterson, 1998)

States may also restrict, control, or ban the consumption of goods ranging from drugs to radios and computers.

The many economic, coordinating, and controlling functions of states require extensive recordkeeping, which gave rise to writing and systems of weights and measures. In some states, cities arose as administrative, religious, and economic centers. These centers then stimulated important cultural achievements in science, art, architecture, and philosophy.

A major defining characteristic of state societies is the government’s monopoly over the use of force. States forbid individuals or groups to use force except under the state’s authorization. Laws, which are usually written, are enforced by formal and specialized institutions. Courts and police forces, for example, have the authority to impose all kinds of punishments: fines, confiscation of property, imprisonment, and even death.

Warfare may play an important role in state formation and operation. Engaging successfully in warfare often strengthens the power of the state. Warfare leads to the suppression of internal conflict and, usually, more centralized control of production. Because going to war in state societies benefits some economic and political groups more than others, states also take increasing control over information and channels of communication, using propaganda to mask the unequal benefits of war. This strengthens not only the war effort but also the power of the state.

The State and Social Stratification

The Asante state (described in the Reading Assignment) illustrates many typical qualities of preindustrial state societies. In most cases, such states rested on agriculture. The productivity of agriculture makes it possible for state rulers to use taxation to appropriate wealth. Much of this wealth is used to support the activities of the state itself, such as maintaining administrative and religious bureaucracies and standing armies. However, this wealth also supports the luxurious lifestyle of the elite, which differs substantially from that of ordinary people. States thus create at least three social levels: those who grow the food and perform other jobs in society that are directly productive (such as peasant farmers, miners, and many types of craftspeople), an elite who live by appropriating some of what the producers create, and a bureaucracy that supports and carries out the dictates of the elite (such as members of a standing army). The elite classes in state societies strive to maintain and increase their power and wealth (Figure 7.12).

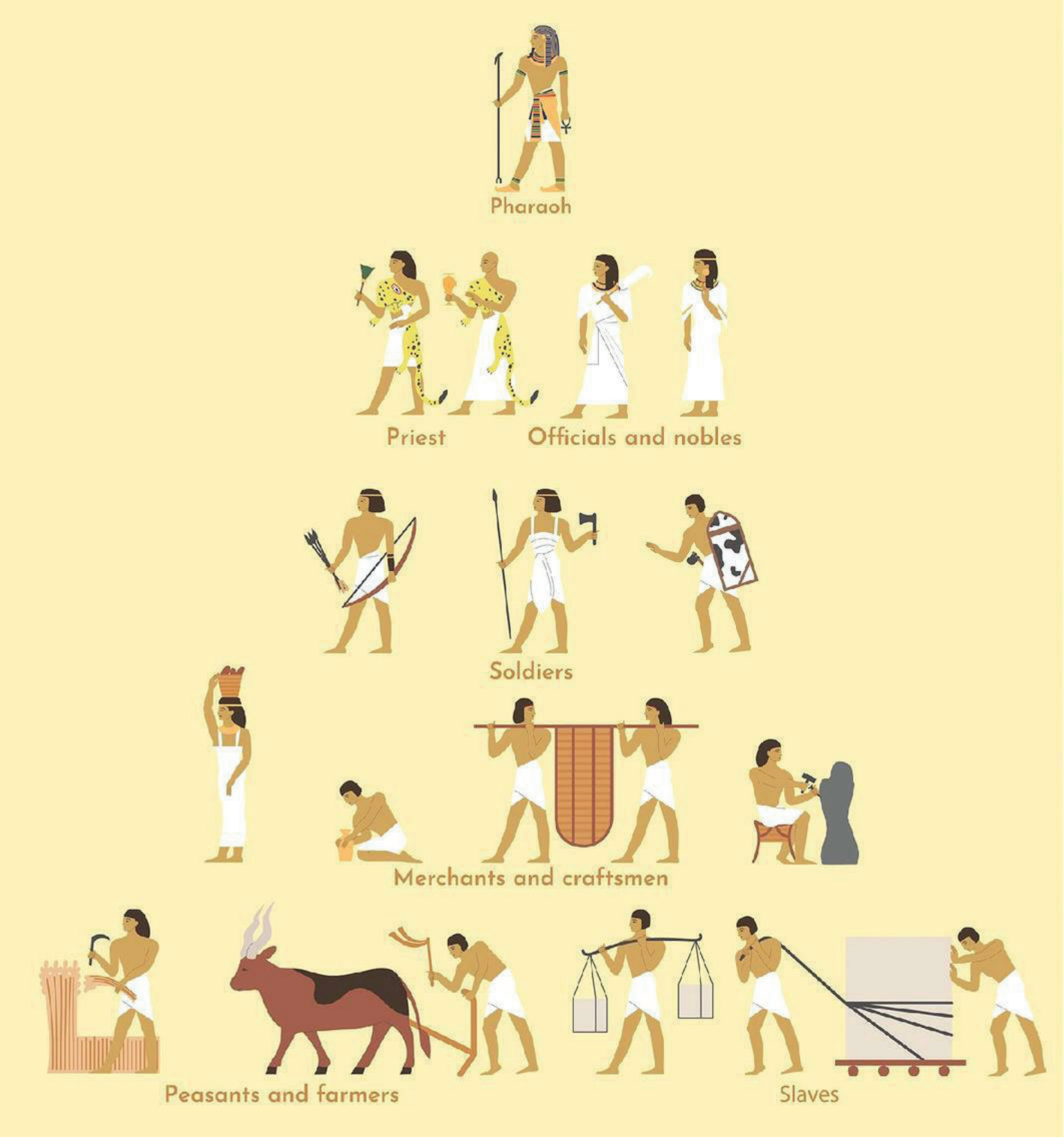

Pharaoh
Priest
Officials and nobles
Soldiers
Merchants and craftsmen
Peasants and farmers
Slaves

Figure 7.12 States have least three social levels: those who perform jobs that are directly productive, an elite who live by appropriating some of what the producers create, and a bureaucracy that supports and carries out the dictates of the elite. The drawing illustrates social levels in ancient Egypt.

SiberianArt/Alamy Stock Vector

State elites maintain their power through control over the centralized government, particularly its institutions of coercion. They attempt to establish a hegemonic ideology encoded in law and culture that identifies their interests with those of society at large. As illustrated by the Asante, the elite's hegemony in culturally legitimating the connection between wealth and power is essential in maintaining state stability.

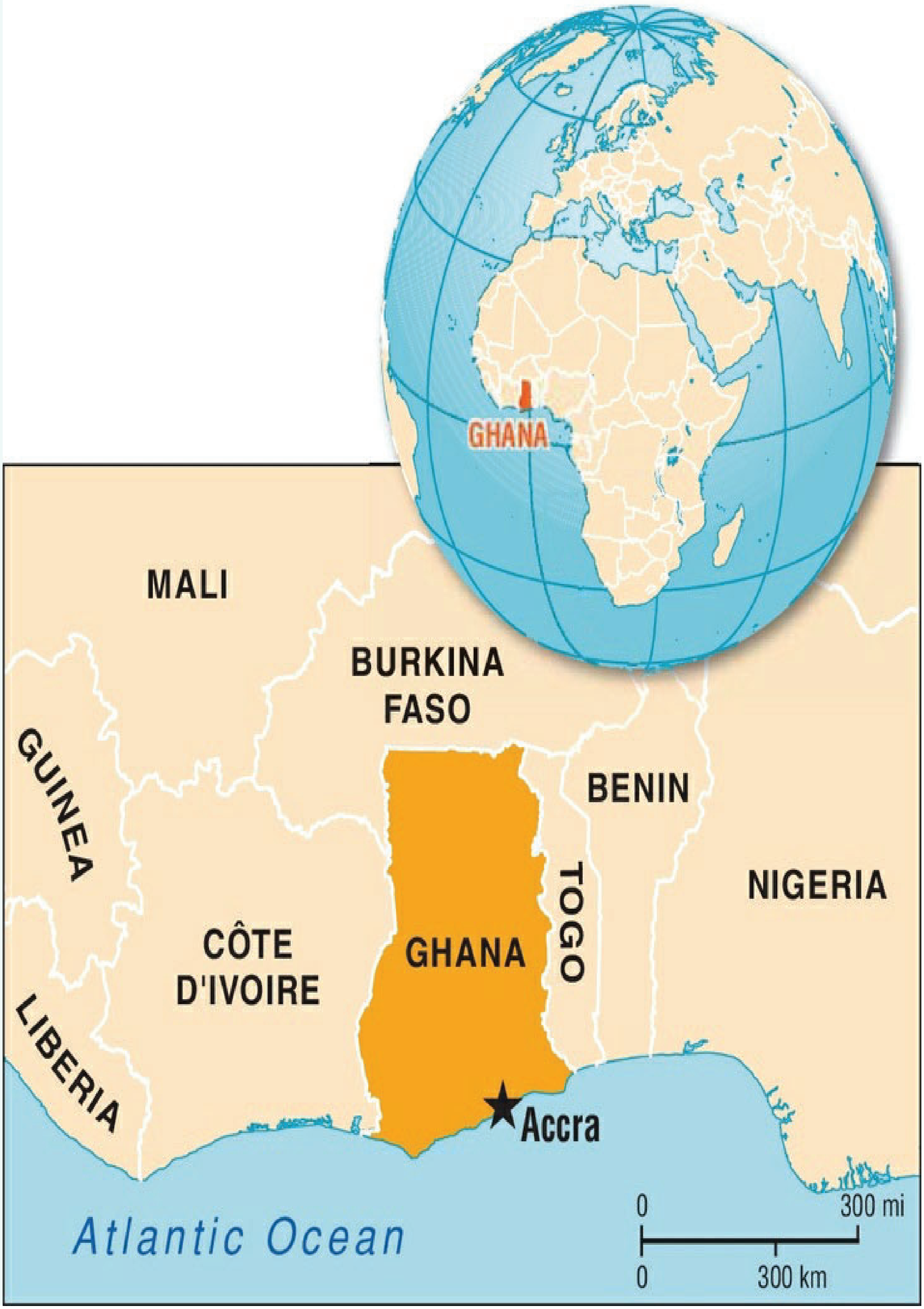
Even with their great coercive and ideological power, however, states are not generally peaceful and stable. They persistently experience rebellion directed at overthrowing those who control the government, and they sometimes experience revolutionary attempts to overthrow the entire structure of government. The state is constantly on the alert to ward off threats to depose the government, outbreaks of violence that might result in civil war, or the disruption of the privileges of powerful individuals or institutions. To the extent that a state wins the loyalty of its people, the constant use of force is not necessary to achieve these ends. However, it is always there in the background as a potential instrument of social control (Kurtz, 1996; Althusser, 2014).

Ethnography

Wealth and Power in the Precolonial Asante State

The Asante, a Twi-speaking Akan people, have long occupied the tropical forest area of what is now south-central Ghana in West Africa. The Asante state emerged in 1701 when the Asante decisively defeated a rival Akan power. The Ashanti state grew and became increasingly complex throughout the 18th century.

The resource bases of the Asante state were agriculture, gold mining, and participation in the European slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries (Wilks, 1993). Asante agricultural productivity rested on simple, labor-intensive technology, producing yam, plantain, cocoyam, cassava, and several other crops. Oil palm fruits, palm wine, fungi, and wild yams provided additional dietary support, as did wild game, freshwater fish, and, on a smaller scale, domestic sheep, fowl, goats, and pigs, which were used as food mainly on ritual occasions. This economy was organized, overseen, and given direction by the state. The economic productivity supported the rural population, and a surplus was appropriated by the state to support a nonproducing urban elite centered in Kumasi, the capital.


GHANA
MALI
BURKINA FASO
GUINEA
BENIN
TOGO
NIGERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
LIBERIA
Accra
Atlantic Ocean
0
300 mi
0
300 km

Description

Map 7.2 Map of the Ashanti empire.

The highly productive Asante economy was the basis of a complex social hierarchy ruled by the Asantehene, or king. The urban elite was mainly involved in transacting government business, performing elaborate state ceremonies, or producing luxury goods for the wealthy. The prodigious food requirements of Kumasi reflected the association of high social status and material well-being characteristic of elites in state societies. The Asantehene’s household alone—his royal wives and children—consumed large quantities of locally grown food daily, along with imported delicacies such as mutton, turkey, duck, wild game, rice, European biscuits, tea, sugar, and wine. Some of these were gifts from foreign visitors, which were reciprocated with local food supplies.

Asante society was composed of several social classes: alien slaves, peasant commoners living in outlying villages, urban specialists offering their services to the elite, government officials of various classes and positions, and, at the top of the hierarchy, the Asantehene himself, with his royal family. It was a dynamic social system, based on inheritance, achievement, competition, and accumulation of wealth, with widely different levels of material well-being and opportunities for social mobility.

Precolonial Asante used espionage, detention, fines, confiscation of property, exile, and execution to keep its people in line. However, like all successful states, it promoted a hegemonic ideology to support its social organization. At its core, this ideology linked wealth and power. The Ashanti believed that these went hand in hand and both benefited society. Accumulating wealth resulted in high office, and holding high office had to be justified by the accumulation and display of wealth.

Wealth among the Ashanti had many sources, such as controlling human labor, owning land, and holding high office. However, ultimately, the key factor determining wealth and social status was control of gold. Gold was the currency of the state and was used to pay taxes and fines. It was used in rituals and worn to display social status. It could also be used to buy European goods such as guns, gunpowder, cloth, and luxury articles. Thus, gold was in huge demand, and, in addition to displaying and spending it, the Ashanti also accumulated and hoarded it. There was an extensive system of borrowing and lending gold at high interest rates.

The state itself accumulated large quantities of gold. In theory, it accepted only gold for payment of fines, tributes, taxes, and levies. However, those without gold could provide land and laborers instead, enriching the state coffers. The state also accrued wealth by using discretion in applying legal sanctions. For example, an individual could buy himself out of a mandatory death sentence with a payment of gold to the state. The state also imposed an inheritance tax on both land and property. Death assessments were made on a case-by-case basis, allowing the state to fine-tune its control over the elite and prevent the emergence of a class of hereditary property owners that might be a threat to its power. The state also controlled the opportunities to accumulate wealth on the largest scale; it could bestow gifts such as being named commander of the state’s armies or conductor of the state’s trade, or it could award an individual a state office.

The state also controlled symbolic capital. Only the state could bestow titles or other symbols of high status on individuals. Complex rituals and ceremonies, which combined public display and acclamation, included symbolic and historical references aimed at glorifying the state and recalling the role of public officials as providers and protectors of the people. The

Asantehene possessed the Golden Stool and the Golden Elephant’s Tail, symbols of political power and wealth. The Golden Stool was said to have descended from heaven to the lap of the first Asantehene and was believed to embody the soul of the Ashanti people. It was, and remains, a powerful symbol of political authority. The Golden Elephant’s Tail symbolized the wealth of the state and the idea that wealth flowed upward from the people to the state. The elephant tail was the “helper” of the stool; wealth helps power. This symbolic conjunction, reinforced in ritual, promoted the political ideology that Asante culture and society were “helped” into being by the processes of accumulation activated by the state. The Asantehene could grant people who successfully accumulated wealth the right to have a regular elephant’s tail carried before them—a symbol of their wealth and their connection with the state.

Understanding that foreign practices and ideas, particularly as they related to the accumulation and distribution of wealth, might undermine the control of the Asante state, the government tried to control the entry of foreign culture into the Asante kingdom. However, as European contact increased in the mid-19th century, the Asante state suffered from both internal and external pressures. By the late 19th century, it had become a British colony. Upon independence from Britain in 1957, the Asante became an ethnic group within the Republic of Ghana, but the Asantehene today retains his high position as a ritual, spiritual, and cultural leader of the Asante people. The current Asantehene, Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II, is active in both national and international politics. Trained in accounting and public administration, he once worked for Mutual of Omaha. Before becoming Asantehene, he founded and ran a company that dealt in mining equipment. As Asantehene, he has been particularly active in promoting education and health care.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What were some of the local economic factors that enabled the Asante state to maintain its power?
2. What were some important global factors that both supported and undermined the power of the Asante state?
3. Compare the ideology of the relation between wealth and power in the Asante state with that of the United States.

Source: Adapted from T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

THE NATION-STATE

As we have noted, states are created through the incorporation of disparate people into a single political entity. However, historically, this did not necessarily mean the creation of a single identity. For example, although there is much debate about the size of the population of the Roman Empire under Augustus, its first emperor (Scheidel, 2007), there is no doubt that it included people of many different ethnic groups speaking a myriad of languages and that only a relatively small percentage of them were Roman citizens. Similarly, the Angevin Empire, created by Henry II, king of England (1133–1189), covered an area stretching from Ireland to northern Spain. The people living in this area had no sense of themselves as English, and Henry II himself spoke only French and Latin. Far more recently, at the time of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire included people who thought of themselves as having many different identities: Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Croats, Serbs, and many others. Disputes about the relationship between these identities and the empire were a critical cause of the war.

The Rise of the Nation-State

Most children learn in school that a **nation-state** is a government and territory that is identified with a (relatively) culturally homogeneous population and a national history: The Italians live in Italy and the Germans in Germany. However, the nation-state is a relatively recent development. Although there are precedents for it, the idea that a nation is a geographical area with a single government and a people sharing a common identity and destiny dates only to the 18th and 19th centuries. The nation-states of Italy and Germany have only existed since 1871. Before then, the geographical regions that we call Germany and Italy were composed of numerous different kingdoms, dutchies, free cities, and principalities, each with its own history and identity.

People in nation-states often feel that the nation is a natural entity based on common descent, language, culture, history, and territory. But all nation-states are composed of many heterogeneous groups, and the things their members share must be constructed. Benedict Anderson (1991) called nation-states “imagined communities” because it takes an act of imagination to weld the many different groups that make up the state into a coherent national community. People in nation-states often feel community with millions who they will never meet and with whom they have little connection other than as citizens of the nation. Anthropologists are particularly interested in the historical circumstances under which nation-states arise, the processes by which they are constructed and maintained, and the circumstances under which they are challenged and destabilized.

The nation-state has many resources available as it seeks to repress loyalties to smaller cultural groups and conceal the invented or imagined nature of the nation. One way nation-states construct national identities is to draw boundaries between spatially defined insiders and outsiders (Handler, 1988). Regardless of cultural differences, people who live within the boundaries of the state are encouraged through education, law, and ritual to understand themselves as having a common identity. People outside the national boundary are viewed as different or other. Surveying and mapping play a critical role in this process. Guntram Herb (1999), p. 24) notes that people understand maps as objective, accurate, and truthful and therefore they can “communicate a precise image of the limits of a nation and foster a territorial consensus.” The importance of this spatial dimension is continually impressed on us by colorful world maps, which visually represent the world as a collection of nation-states (see Figure 7.13) (Alonso, 1994, p. 382).

EUROPE
FRANCE
SPAIN
POLAND
UKRAINE
TURKEY
Mediterranean Sea
Black Sea
ALGERIA
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
LIBYA
EGYPT
CHAD
SUDAN
SOUTH SUDAN
NIGERIA
AFRICA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO
ETHIOPIA
SOMALIA
KENYA
TANZANIA
ANGOLA
ZAMBIA
NAMIBIA
BOTSWANA
ZIMBABWE
MOZAMBIQUE
SOUTH AFRICA
MADAGASCAR
SAUDI ARABIA
IRAQ
IRAN
YEMEN
OMAN
Red Sea
Arabian Sea
SEYCHELLES
MALDIVES
Mozambique Channel
INDIAN OCEA

Figure 7.13 Political maps of the world reinforce the idea that it is natural for nation-states to exist as territorial units.

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A common interpretation of the past is essential in creating national identities. Thus, nation-states are constructed by attaching people to time as well as space. Education plays a key role in this. Consider the names of some grade school social studies books: *America: History of Our Nation* (2011), *The American Journey* (2007), *Our America* (2011). All emphasize the idea of shared nationhood. However, because different groups within the nation have different interpretations of its history, the content of history education is often controversial. Fights about the contents of American history textbooks have become central to American politics. Claims about the role of white supremacy in U.S. history, the contributions of African Americans and other people of color, “critical race theory,” and the *New York Times* 1619 project are discussed and debated at schoolboards and in national politics. In 2020, the American Library Association reported 156 attempts to ban books at schools, libraries, and universities. In 2021, this number jumped to 729 challenges involving 1,597 books. All but one of the 10 books that people most frequently sought to ban were about race, LGBT+ sexuality, or both (NPR, 2022).

Nation-states actively invent tradition and history to align with contemporary national interests. National identity is reproduced through rituals, symbols, ceremonies, memorials, and representations in museums and other cultural institutions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Activities such as coronations, inaugurations, pledging allegiance to the flag, singing national anthems, and parades are some of the tools that create and maintain the nation-state (Figure 7.14).

Figure 7.14 Nation-states make extensive use of symbols and rituals to give people a sense of shared membership. Here, students recite the Pledge of Allegiance in an American classroom.

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States use education, law, and the media to create a national culture and identity that becomes the only authorized representation of society. Through law, the state can suppress certain aspects of minority cultures, particularly their languages, thus undermining their cultural cohesion. The state may also promote nationalism by incorporating elements of subcultures into the national culture. For example, in many nations of Central and South America, indigenous Indian ethnicity, where it is not repressed, is defined in ways that serve nationalistic purposes. In Guatemala, many indigenous people live in deep poverty, and many of the wealthy claim Spanish descent. However, the Tecún Umán, the last ruler of the K’iche-Maya people who was killed fighting against the Spanish in 1524, is celebrated. Statues, paintings, and poems identify him as a hero, and Tecún Umán Day is celebrated every February 20th. Even when indigenous peoples are not identified as backward and standing in the way of national development, their cultures may be incorporated into national identity only as a fossilized past or an artistic expression that encourages foreign tourism (Alonso, 1994, p. 398).

Attempts by nation-states to create a common identity are dynamic and in tension with the efforts of groups that wish to preserve their own identity and autonomy. In many cases, these groups form separatist movements that demand either the creation of a new nation or increased autonomy within the existing nation. Virtually every European nation has separatist movements. Some of the best known are in Spain (Basque and Catalonian), the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland and Scotland), and Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia) (Henley et al., 2017). Numerous political groups in the United States and Canada have also proposed new nations, most notably in Quebec, Canada.

Nation-states may also fail in their attempt to impose national identity. Fragile states are nation-states that, because of failures of government, education, security, and economy, are unable to create a coherent national identity. In most cases, they are profoundly violent places in which no group has the power to either firmly suppress others or enforce agreements with them. Some of the weakest states in 2021 were South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic, Yemen, Sudan, and Syria (Fund for Peace, 2021).

Anthropology Makes a Difference

The Rise of Populism

The past several years have seen the rise and increased prominence of populist regimes. Leaders and governments that are widely viewed as populist include Vladimir Putin in Russia, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Narendra Modi in India, and Donald Trump in the United States. But what exactly is populism, and how does it tie these nations together?

The definition of populism is much debated, but it has two widely agreed-upon characteristics. First, populist movements split society in two. They claim to speak for or be guided by the will of the people. However, in doing so, they define their supporters as “the people” and all others as enemies of “the people.” For example, in a June 2020 tweet, Donald Trump showed a meme that read, “In reality they’re not after me they’re after you I’m just in the way” with a picture of himself in the background (Acharya, 2020). Thus, he divided his possible audience into his supporters and an evil “them,” everyone else, and positioned himself as the force that could stop the evil “them.” A lawsuit forced Twitter to remove the image, but the tweet was popular among Trump’s supporters and has appeared on T-shirts, billboards, and posters.

Second, populism is, in the words of the political scientist Cas Mudde (2004), a “thin ideology.” That is, it calls for the elimination of enemies of the people and usually the end of “elite” control of the political establishment but says nothing about how the state should be organized once this is accomplished. Therefore, there are populists across the political spectrum—from the leftist populism of the late Hugo Chávez and his current heir Nicolás Maduro to the right-wing populism of Viktor Orbán, the Islamic populism of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Hindu populism of Narendra Modi.

Economic and political trends of the past decade have made fertile grounds for emerging populism. The move away from manufacturing in the economies of North America and Europe has led to a steady erosion of the middle classes in those places. Industrial jobs have increasingly been replaced by service and information jobs, most of which pay less. The pain of this dislocation was exacerbated by the financial crisis of the late 2000s, which led to widespread unemployment and the erosion or disappearance of assets, particularly real estate. In the mid-2010s, this was coupled with waves of political refugees and economic migrants seeking better lives (or, in some cases, simple survival) in Europe and North America. Lifestyles and economies around the world were further dislocated by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019.

Politicians such as Orbán capitalize on these trends. Anthropologist Andria Timmer (2017) has shown how Orbán used billboards to display nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric. Billboards with messages like, “If you come to Hungary, you must keep our laws,” were printed in Hungarian and clearly aimed at Hungarian citizens, not immigrants. Their intended effect was to catalyze anger against refugees. In Venezuela, volunteers at a local TV station were taught to base their understanding on class distinctions. A course instructor declared, “We are totally partial toward the people.…The country is divided in two and this is a class struggle” (in Samet

& Schiller, 2017). The instructor did not intend all of the nation’s people, only those who supported Chávez and Maduro's United Socialist Party.

The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk claims modern capitalism presents irritated and isolated individuals with desires they cannot fulfill, and this leads to “an impulse to hate everything.” Politicians such as Donald Trump, who Sloterdijk considers “an innovator when it comes to fear,” use this frustration to create and maintain their positions (in Meaney, 2018).

Anthropologists have explored and analyzed populist movements from a variety of perspectives. In her examination of advertising in Hungary, Timmer looked not only at the content of government billboards but also at how people had resisted or modified their messages. Agnes Mondragón and Stephen Schwartz have done a similar thing for wall murals of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Aciksoz and Korkman (2017) have investigated how populism intersects with gender—particularly how leaders such as Donald Trump, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Vladimir Putin attempt to portray hypermasculinity and how such portrayals are resisted and subverted by their opponents and artists. And Sally Galman (2017) has addressed how populism affects transgendered people.

Populism presents interesting and significant challenges for anthropologists. Anthropology investigates and, in most cases, celebrates the diversity of cultures. Anthropologists are not moral relativists, but their embrace of the techniques of cultural relativism leads them to understand the world through many different points of view. Populism insists on the erasure of differences and the primacy of a single people and a single point of view. Despite this tension, anthropologists have the tools to analyze and understand populism as a form of culture, expose its structure and its roots, and, perhaps, in some cases, resist it.

The Nation-State and the Global Economy

Nation-states began to develop in the 18th and 19th centuries and will probably persist for the foreseeable future. Globalization has provided some benefits to them but also poses strong challenges. As Chapter 14 will show, the processes tying disparate parts of the world together into a single economy date back centuries, but technological changes in communication, transportation, and finance have greatly accelerated in the past half-century. These changes extend the reach of nation-states but can create difficulties for them as well.

The technological and military power of wealthy nation-states enables them to advance their political agendas and protect their identities and borders. The promotion of media such as films, games, and music turns national identity into a kind of brand (Anholt, 2013), and this is used by corporations to promote sales and profits. Just as Hollywood is linked to the United States, the Indian, Chinese, and Hong Kong film industries promote their own national identities. As brands such as McDonald's, Levi Strauss, Harley Davidson, and Apple are linked to American national identity, Sony is linked to Japan and Samsung to Korea.

However, these international connections present problems as well. In the past, governments and elites focused on integrating national economies and identities. Road, railroad, telegraph, and telephone systems were constructed to bring all parts of the nation together as an economic unit. Education systems promoted a national history and identity. Today, much of the integration is global, happening among rather than within nations. Vast quantities of goods and information move across international borders. As anyone who has ever phoned for tech support knows, a call made to a local number is often answered on the other side of the world.

In addition, corporations, their shareholders, and their managerial teams are increasingly international. For example, more than half of the revenue for Ford, IBM, Dow Chemical, Apple, and Intel comes from overseas. Conversely, many products closely identified with the United States are actually produced by companies owned in other countries. Budweiser is produced by the Belgian company InBev, which also produces Corona, Becks, and Stella Artois. French's Mustard and Lysol are owned by Reckitt Benckiser, an Anglo-Dutch company, and "Vermont's Finest," Ben and Jerry's ice cream, is owned by Unilever, another Anglo-Dutch company. Or, if it's more your style, Wild Turkey Kentucky Bourbon was owned by the French company Pernod Ricard but is now owned by the Italian multinational Gruppo Campari, which also owns Irish Mist, a liqueur made in Dublin.

Some of the issues and concerns surrounding multinational corporations will be discussed in Chapter 16. Here, the critical point is that large corporations such as those mentioned control a substantial portion of the world's economy. They can engage in political and social action not only in their country of origin but also throughout the world. Although they may have many interests, their main focus is on returning profits to their shareholders. Their actions may coincide with the interests of the nation-states where such corporations are based … but more likely they do not.

Further, the executives of these corporations and many others are increasingly multinational themselves. They may own residences in multiple nations, and their children may be educated internationally. Their investments are often similarly multinational. None of this is necessarily a bad thing. However, it does create a dynamic and changing situation. In state societies, elites tended to promote hegemonic ideas of culture. In nation-states, these ideas often centered on notions of national identity. Today, although nationalism is a powerful political force, it may not be very meaningful for the wealthy and powerful themselves. About 52 million people live in households with a net worth of more than $1 million; together, they control almost 43% of the world's wealth but comprise 1% of the world's population. Members of this group are likely to have strong bonds with other elites but only weak ties to any particular nation.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

Question: Should everyone be a citizen of a nation-state?

Following the emergence of the nation-state, the world has been divided into countries with agreed-upon national boundaries. Although border disputes continue to exist, the result of this division is that, in principle, every person in the world lives within the borders of a nation-state. And, in principle, every person is a citizen of such a state. However, in practice, there are significant exceptions to this rule. No one knows the number of stateless people in the world. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees reports 3.9 million but considers this an underestimate. A global figure of at least 10 million people in the world is often used (Nahmias, 2020). The stateless are denied a nationality.

There are numerous ways in which individuals and groups can become stateless. Individuals may become stateless because of gaps in nationality laws. For example, in Kuwait, if a child's mother is not Kuwaiti and is unmarried, the child does not have Kuwaiti citizenship and may be stateless (Mahdavi, 2015, p. 73). A second way statelessness can occur is if the country where a child is born does not permit nationality based on birth alone. Only 33 of the roughly 195 countries in the world have *jus solis* ("law of the soil"), the legal principle that grants automatic citizenship to everyone born within their borders (Cabaniss, 2015). Twenty-seven countries restrict the rights of women to pass their citizenship on to their children (Theodorou, 2014).

Statelessness may occur as the result of the emergence of new states or changes in borders. It can also occur when states declare that entire groups or peoples do not belong to the state. The most famous recent case of this is the Rohingya Muslims. In the mid-2000s, more than 1.1 million Rohingya lived in Myanmar and had no other citizenship. However, the state, which is predominantly Buddhist, has declared them "nonnationals" and views them as illegal immigrants.

There are many other cases of groups of people being denied nationality, such as Haitians in the Dominican Republic, Russians in Estonia and Latvia, members of indigenous groups in Thailand, and the Karana in Madagascar.

Statelessness presents profound problems for its victims. In the current world, people gain rights and opportunities through their citizenship. People with no citizenship may have very few rights. They cannot vote in elections, and they are routinely denied access to social services. In many places, they may be denied the right to go to school, visit a doctor, hold a job, open a bank account, or even get married (UNHCR, n.d.). Think of how many times you are asked for your Social Security number and consider how difficult life would be if you could never have one. And be aware that in many other nations, you'd be asked for your identification far more frequently than you are in the United States.

The most dangerous form of statelessness is when groups are deprived of their citizenship. Before the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stripped Jews and members of some other minorities of their citizenship. This is an apt example because people stripped of any citizenship can be denied all rights, including the right to remain alive. Laws that identify people as stateless place them beyond the nation and community and, in many cases, identify them as targets for hatred and violence. For example, the government of Myanmar has pursued policies against the stateless Rohingya that some have labeled genocide (Nebehay & Lewis, 2018). The Myanmar military, aided by paramilitary groups and Myanmar citizens, has conducted campaigns of intimidation and violence against the Rohingya. In one incident, the military and paramilitary police organized villagers to burn Rohingya homes and hack Rohingya prisoners to death (Lone et al., 2018). Similar incidents have taken place throughout Rakhine State, a region of Myanmar bordering Bangladesh. As of late 2017, at least 745,000 Rohingya had fled from their homes in Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh (OCHA, n.d.), and at least 24,000 had either been murdered by Myanmar military or paramilitary forces or died in the attempt to flee from them.

The concept of citizenship is intimately bound with the idea of the nation-state. Before the nation-state, people in states and chiefdoms were usually considered subjects of their rulers, not citizens. And people in bands and tribes understood themselves primarily as family and lineage members rather than as members of larger political units. These forms of identification continue to exist and remain important for many indigenous people. However, it is clear that rights of national citizenship are important to every person in the world today and that those without citizenship are disadvantaged and, in some cases, in mortal danger.

Key Questions

1. Does statelessness exist in wealthy countries such as the United States? How does the status of the “Dreamers” (people who entered the United States illegally as young children) compare with that of the stateless?
2. What are the responsibilities of the governments toward the stateless? Do the United States and other powerful nations have responsibilities toward groups such as the Rohingya?
3. The United States and Canada are two of only 33 countries that have *jus soli*, the right to citizenship of any individual born on their soil. Why do you think this right is so limited, and do you believe it should be expanded?

SUMMARY

1. How does political organization relate to social differentiation? What are the major types of systems of social differentiation? Social differentiation is a key feature of political organization. Anthropologists have identified three major systems of social differentiation: egalitarian, rank, and stratified societies. Each of these is typically associated with different economic, social, and political features.
2. What are the main characteristics of the various systems of social

differentiation within egalitarian and rank societies? Egalitarian and rank societies are both nonstratified systems of social differentiation. Egalitarian societies, which are mainly found among foragers and in some horticultural societies, give every individual and group in society equal access to basic resources, power, and prestige. Rank societies, or chiefdoms, recognize differences in prestige among individuals and groups, but no one is denied access to the resources necessary for survival. Rank societies are organized through kinship, and the position of chief is maintained largely through the redistribution of goods.

3. What are stratified societies and what kinds of social systems are they identified with? Stratified societies are associated with the state. Social, political, and economic inequalities are institutionalized and maintained through a combination of internalized controls, political power, and force. Kinship ties between the upper and lower classes no longer integrate the society, there are wide gaps in standards of living, and some people have no access to basic resources.
4. What are some of the functions of political organization and law? What are some of the means for achieving these aims? Political organization and law address the universal human problems of coordinating and regulating human behavior through making and enforcing decisions affecting the common good and resolving conflicts. This is accomplished through both formal and informal means. Informal social control is achieved through gossip, ridicule, and ostracism; formal sanctions include exile, death, and punishments meted out by courts, judges, police, and other institutionalized forms of regulation.
5. What are the four major types of political organization identified by anthropologists, and what is the basis of this typology? Four major forms of political organization are bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Anthropologists base this classification on the degree of specialization of political functions, the extent to which authority is centralized, and the number of different groups found in the society.
6. What are the differentiating characteristics of bands and tribes? Band societies, found mainly among foragers, have little

integration of groups beyond the level of the band, with no central leadership or formal means of social control. Tribal organization, found mainly among horticulturists and pastoralists, is based on localized kin groups who typically act independently but under certain conditions may also act collectively.

7. What are the differentiating characteristics of chiefdoms and states? In chiefdoms, kinship is the most important principle of social organization. Chiefdoms concentrate power in the office of the chief. Chiefs exert control over the redistribution of food and other goods. A state is a hierarchical, centralized form of political organization. States are characterized by high levels of social stratification. Kinship plays a smaller role in states than in chiefdoms.
8. How is the connection between social stratification and the state illustrated in the ethnography of the Asante kingdom? The Asante state consisted of political elites and peasants, with the king at the top of the social system. The centralized government controlled the sources, distribution, and ritual display of wealth, maintaining itself through an ideology that held that accumulated wealth in the hands of the elite benefited the whole society.
9. What are some of the economic, social, political, and cultural features of state societies? State societies usually depend on agriculture, which provides economic surpluses that permit the development of centralized government, cities, occupational specialization, trade, taxation, social stratification, and bureaucracy. In state societies, the government controls the legitimate use of force, which it may use against its citizens and other peoples, but states also maintain themselves by developing hegemonic ideologies that justify the elite’s control of the population.
10. What is a nation-state, and how is it an imagined community? The nation-state, a relatively recent form of political organization, is a government or territory identified with a (relatively) culturally homogeneous population and a national history. Nation-states are imagined communities because they depend on people of different backgrounds who have never met one another agreeing that they share a common identity. Nation-states maintain power

by drawing cultural boundaries between members and outsiders, promoting historical narratives that support nationalism, creating laws that suppress minority cultures, and sponsoring rituals that declare national identity.

11. What are the characteristics of populism? Populism is a type of political movement in which leaders claim to speak for the people. However, in doing so, they divide the nation into two groups, one of which they identify as good and one of which they claim is bad or evil. Populism is a “thin ideology.” Populist politicians may use its techniques to promote very different political ideologies. Economic and social conditions in many places have favored the rise of populism since the mid-2000s.
12. How does globalization both support and threaten the nation-state? Globalism supports the nation-state through information technologies and business practices that promote the interests of nation-states, making them effectively commercial brands. It threatens the state through its creation of multinational elites, the spread of globalized companies with interests other than those of the nation-state, and the rapid movement of large numbers of political refugees and economic migrants between states.
13. What is statelessness, and why is it a problem? Stateless people are those denied citizenship in any nation-state because of the specific conditions of their birth, their ethnicity, or changes in law. Stateless people are frequently unable to access basic services such as education or health care. When groups of people are denied citizenship, they may become targets of genocidal violence.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Distinguish between power, authority, and leadership and give some examples of each.
2. Anthropologists often say that all societies have politics but not all societies have government. What do they mean by this? Explain what politics means with and without

government.

3. In this chapter, we explored the political difference between bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. If you imagined a society moving through these different political forms, what general trends would emerge as the group passed through the sequence?
4. What are some distinguishing characteristics of nation-states? Give some examples of state societies that are not nation-states and some that are. Explain why your examples are or are not nation-states.
5. Carefully consider the relationship between globalization and the nation-state. In what ways did historic patterns of globalization play an important role in the creation of nation-states? To what degree is current globalization compatible with the success of the nation-state?

Key Terms

authority (p. 185)

band (p. 191)

bigman (p. 194)

chiefdom (p. 198)

egalitarian society (p. 185)

hegemony (p. 187)

leadership (p. 187)

mediation (p. 196)

nation-state (p. 206)

political ideology (p. 185)

political organization (p. 184)

power (p. 185)

rank society (p. 185)

rebellion (p. 190)

revolution (p. 190)

state (p. 200)

stratified society (p. 185)

tribe (p. 192)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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A globe at the top depicts the location of the Yoruba and Mende ethnic groups and the town of Otuam. To its bottom in a box is a map that are labeled the regions of Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D’Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon. The ethnic groups are shaded. Ghana with the Otuam region, Sierra Leone with Mende, and Nigeria with Yoruba are shaded. The Atlantic Ocean and a scale of 0 to 500 km is given to its bottom.

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A globe at the top depicts Ghana. To its bottom in a box is a map with the regions of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Cote D’Ivoire, Benin, Togo, and Nigeria marked and labeled. Ghana is shaded and Accra is starred. The Atlantic Ocean and a scale of 0 to 300 km is given at its bottom.

8 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: CLASS AND CASTE

Though almost all human societies have inequality, only some have relatively durable structures of social classes and castes. In such societies, relatively small groups have access to much greater prestige, power, and, usually, material wealth than others.

Lane Oatey/Blue Jean Images

Learning Objectives

8.1 Compare and contrast different theories of social stratification.

8.2 Discuss the relationship between social stratification, wealth, power, and prestige.

8.3 Analyze social class differences in the United States by relating income inequality, class mobility, and class subcultures.

8.4 Summarize the features of the caste system in India and evaluate its relationship to religion, colonialism, and social mobility.

8.5 Describe platform capitalism and the gig economy and assess its relation to social stratification.

Economic inequality is a global phenomenon and also central to the culture and society of the United States. Consider, for example, a middle-class family in North America: The four family members have a combined income of more than $63,000; they live in a comfortable home or apartment and have two cars. Each child has a bedroom. The family's many consumer goods are mostly manufactured outside North America. They eat three meals a day, and much of their diet is based on imported foods. The children are healthy and attend a good school, which will prepare them for college and allow them to choose among a variety of professional careers. On average, they will live to be around 80 years old. This middle-class family faces increasing problems, however. Strong competitive pressures for both parents at work and the children at school, rising medical costs, annually increasing college tuition, the possibility of economic recession, and increasing debt all threaten their way of life. A 2019 Pew survey showed that a majority in the United States believe that in 2050, the United States will be less important in the world, the gap between the rich and poor will be greater, and the country will be more politically divided (Parker et al., 2019). Still, millions of people throughout the world are aspiring to this family's lifestyle and economic status.

We can understand these aspirations by comparing this family with a typical family in rural Asia. There, the household averages 10 or more people, including parents, children, and other relatives, and has a combined annual income of less than $500. The family lives in a one-room house, working as tenant farmers on a large agricultural estate owned by an absentee landlord. The adults and older children work all day on the land. None of the adults can read or write. Only two of the five school-age children regularly attend school, and they will get only a basic primary education. The family often eats only one meal a day, which rarely changes and leaves the children hungry. The house has no electricity or fresh water supply. There is much illness but very few medical practitioners. The work is hard, the sun is hot, and aspirations for a better life are continually being snuffed out (Todaro & Smith, 2003).

This extreme poverty drives many of these people to look for better opportunities in cities, but while opportunities may improve somewhat, life in urban slums, is also very difficult and people are often homeless (Figure 8.1). To a great extent, the family's survival depends on children's economic contributions (Boo, 2012). While most of us would agree that children should be "protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's … development," as stated in Article 32 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in fact, perhaps as many as a billion children worldwide live in just these conditions. According to a United Nations Children's Fund report, over 100 million of these children live on the streets, although they are largely invisible to people from richer countries in the West and the well-off residents in their own nations.

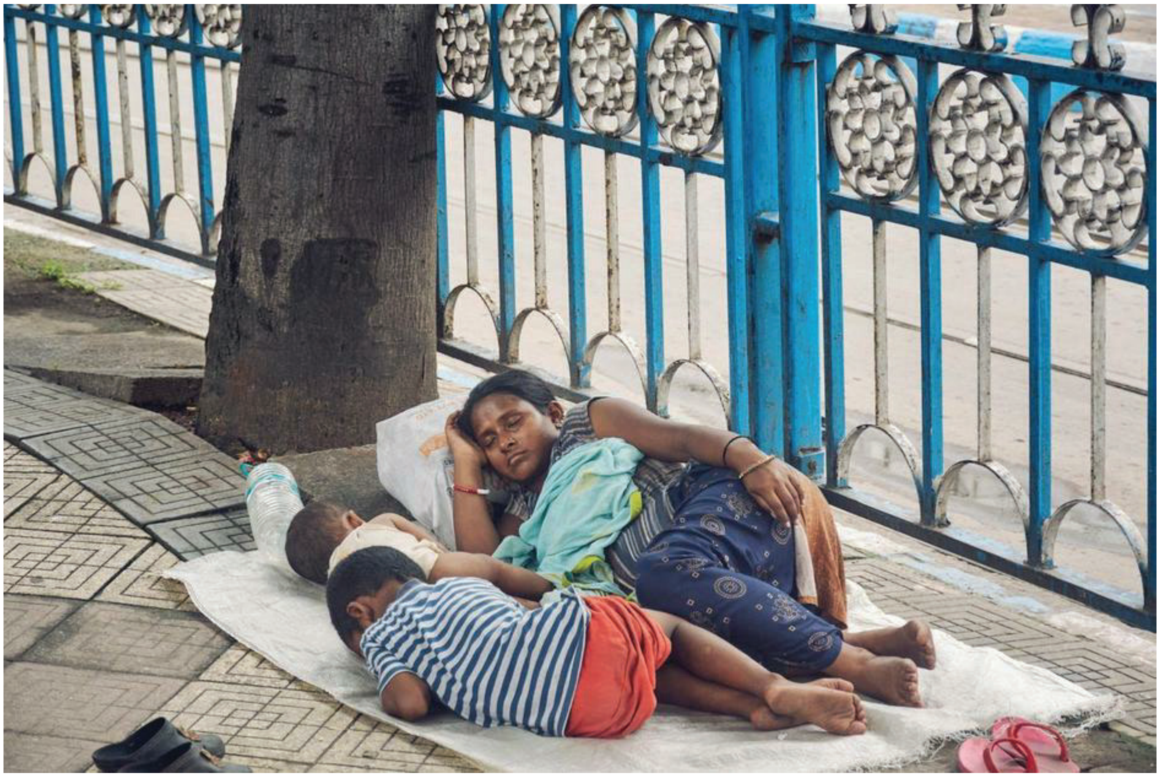

Figure 8.1 A vast number of people live in poverty on the streets of large cities. Here a homeless mother and two children sleep by a footpath in Kolkata, India.

Md Manik/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to the social hierarchy that results from the relatively permanent unequal access to goods and services in state societies. No society has ever successfully organized a large and diverse population without stratification and economic inequalities.

Two major explanations of social stratification are functional and conflict theories. The **functionalist theory of social stratification** holds that social stratification generally benefits the whole society by rewarding people socially and economically for working harder, taking risks, doing difficult jobs, and seeking higher education and occupational training. Medical doctors, for example, whose work is essential to society, are rewarded for their long years in school with both high income and high prestige.

There is no question that **functionalism** works in the sense that it motivates people to take risks and undergo training for the rewards of wealth and prestige (Figure 8.2). If college students were completely assured that their future status and prosperity had nothing at all to do with a college education, enrollments would drop precipitously. It is also fairly clear that current-day state-level societies are well served by at least some inequality. It is hard to imagine what would motivate people to undergo the lengthy training and risk that many jobs in such societies entail if prestige and wealth were not in some way payoffs for this.

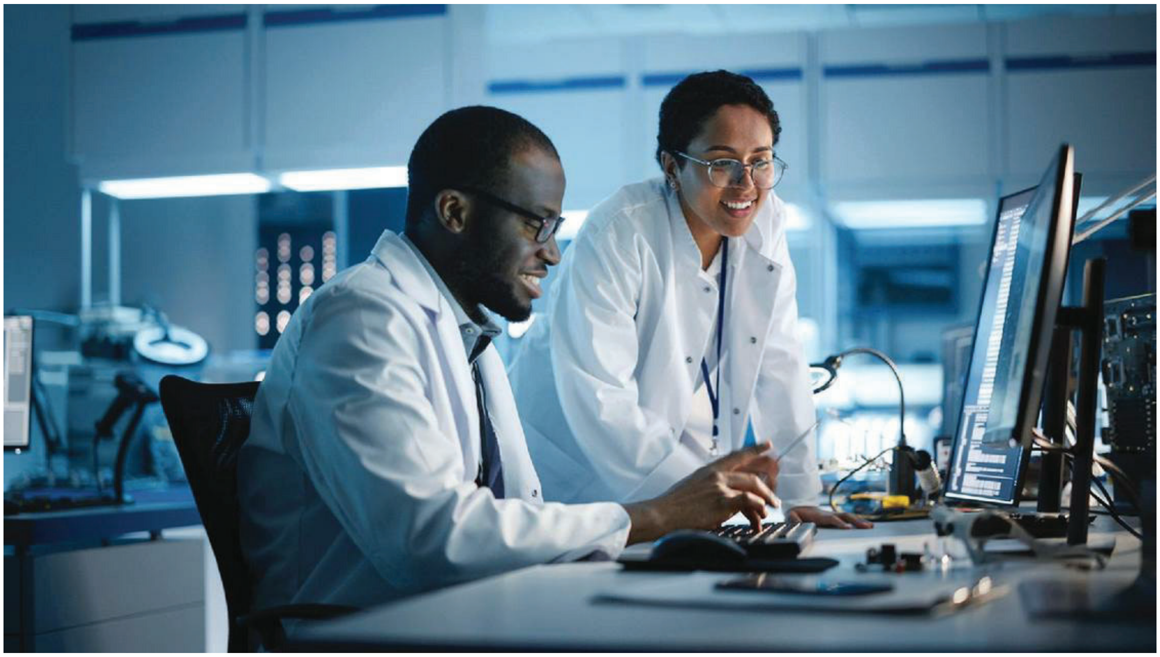

Figure 8.2 In the United States, high-prestige jobs often require lengthy training and risk-taking. Technical and research jobs have both prestige and higher pay than most others but also require more training.

iStockphoto.com/gorodenkoff

However, the functionalist theory also poses problems and issues for society, several of which are worthy of note. First, if it worked perfectly, inequality should draw the brightest, most capable people to the most challenging positions where their talents could be best used and have the most benefit to society. However, structures in stratified society almost always work against this goal. The wealth and power of parents, other family members, and friends may have far more to do with access to prestige and power than any personal characteristics. In premodern states, one's success resulted from being born to the aristocracy, or at least to wealth. In some cases, actually showing talent was frowned upon. In current-day states, it is possible for the children of the poor to rise to great success and the children of the rich to end up impoverished, but the betting odds do not go that way. It's much easier for the children of the wealthy to meet and make connections with other wealthy people than it is for children of the poor to do so. This contributes to the fact that, generally, the children of the poor stay poor, and those of the rich stay rich, regardless of hard work or talents.

A second consideration concerns the motivating power of wealth. For example, although it is obvious that wealth is a powerful motivating force in many contemporary societies, money's ability to motivate a person may have limits. A person making $30,000 a year would work harder for a salary of $60,000 a year, but would a person making $600,000 a year be motivated to work harder for $660,000 a year? In other words, although we can agree that inequality motivates people and provides many benefits to societies, how much inequality is necessary to achieve these benefits is not clear. If our goal is to use inequality to better society by motivating people, we may not need nearly as much inequality as most large-scale societies currently have.

Some analysts argue that the pay for any specific job should have some relation to the social good the job creates. However, although we can argue that there is a connection between social benefit and inequality in general, the link between the pay and prestige of individual jobs and social good is tenuous at best. As the COVID-19 pandemic showed us, “essential workers” include those who work in agriculture, childcare, retail, sanitation, and primary care medicine as well as others who maintain critical parts of infrastructure such as power plants and lines or water and waste systems. Many essential occupations, from childcare providers to food delivery drivers, are low paying.

There is no agreed-upon way to measure how much social good an occupation contributes, but consider trash collectors and brain surgeons. The former have low prestige, while the latter have high prestige. However, trash collectors certainly provide more social good to more people than do brain surgeons. Very few of us, especially those among us who live in large cities, could get through the week without the services of trash collectors. If trash collection fails, cities rapidly become difficult and dangerous to inhabit. On the other hand, most of us will rarely if ever need the services of a brain surgeon. Yet, we want to live in a society where brain surgery is available for those who need it. And this involves granting higher wealth and prestige to those who follow the arduous path to becoming brain surgeons than to those who follow the far simpler path to becoming trash collectors.

Beyond considerations of the efficiency of society and the tasks that must be done, inequality involves conditions of the human spirit. Although inequality seems inevitable in human societies, resentment, however repressed, always seems to accompany substantial inequalities (Scott, 1992). This is especially true when the inequalities are based on such ascribed factors as race, gender, caste, and other attributes an individual is born with and cannot change (Berreman, 1988).

All societies have some degree of social stratification, although in band and tribal societies, this is relatively small and largely determined by gender. No chiefdom or state-level society offers everyone the same opportunities to achieve economic and social success. In all stratified societies, factors including family background, social connections, gender, ethnicity, race, and accumulated wealth play important roles in determining the sorts of opportunities available to individuals. Resentment between people of different levels of wealth and power is particularly likely when inequalities between groups are large and are perceived to be unfair. Such inequality may eventually explode into open conflict and violence.

Conflict theory offers a second approach to understanding inequality. Conflict theorists understand social stratification as resulting from the constant struggle for scarce goods and services. Inequalities exist because individuals and groups seize control of scarce resources or productive resources. They use these resources to acquire power, wealth, and prestige and to maintain control over the system of production and the apparatus of the state. When their attempts to establish dominance falter or are challenged, elites may fall back on the threat or actual use of force to maintain the status quo. Conflict theorists believe these actions divide society into different groups with different interests. For conflict theorists, understanding that society is composed of different groups pursuing different goals, and that this often leads to conflict, is essential to analyzing social stratification.

Conflict theory is central to the work of Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (Figure 8.2). For Marx and those who follow his thinking, the economic system is the critical factor in explaining social stratification. Marx differentiated two main social classes in capitalist society: the capitalists, who own the means of production, and the workers, who must sell their labor to survive. According to Marx, the relationship of individuals to the means of production is critical in determining their wealth, power, and prestige. Marx viewed the conflict between the workers and the owners of the means of production as central to capitalism and predicted this would eventually lead to capitalism’s downfall.

By asking, *“cui bono,”* or who benefits economically, conflict theory enables us to understand some of the hidden motivations of social actors and to assess institutions by their economic and social consequences as well as by their stated intentions. However, just as the functional view of inequality may lead theorists to ignore the possibility of structural conflict, conflict theorists may sometimes ignore the social mechanisms that promote solidarity across class, racial, ethnic, and caste lines.

Figure 8.3 Karl Marx (far right) and Friedrich Engels, shown here with three of Marx’s daughters Jenny, Eleanor, and Laura, believed that analyzing conflict among economically defined groups was basic to understanding the structure and history of society.

ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images

The proponents of functionalist approaches tended to see inequality as a good thing. Marx predicted that inequality, particularly the inherent conflict between the workers and the owners of the means of production, would eventually lead to capitalism’s downfall. They dreamed of a future society without inequality. However, from our perspective, functionalist and conflict theories are complementary ways of looking at society. On the one hand, it is hard to envision a working, complex, modern state society that does not employ inequality in the form of prestige and wealth as a key factor in its social and economic system. Certainly, there are no successful historic or current examples of such a society. On the other hand, issues such as the relationship between birth and **life chances**, the degree of inequality society needs, the social value of different jobs, and the damage inequality—particularly that inequality caused by characteristics such as gender or race—does to the human spirit are entrenched aspects of social stratification. Social stratification necessarily divides society into groups with different interests and, although such groups often cooperate, conflict among them is also basic to stratified societies. Not all such conflicts relate to issues of wealth, social class, and ownership of productive resources, but many of them do.

CRITERIA OF STRATIFICATION: POWER, WEALTH, AND PRESTIGE

All social stratification systems depend on the complex interaction of power, wealth, and prestige. Anthropologists analyze power by examining its sources, the channels through which it is exercised, and its goals. In the United States, for example, we might analyze the different sources, uses, and goals of power among corporate CEOs, elected public officials, entertainment celebrities, heads of organized crime families, or information technology entrepreneurs. Cross-culturally, we might compare the sources, uses, and goals of power among an American president, the prime minister in a parliamentary system of government, the chairman of the Communist Party in the People's Republic of China, the supreme leader in the Islamic Republic of Iran, or the king of Jordan.

Wealth is the accumulation of material resources or access to the means of producing these resources. Although even in capitalist societies, wealth is not the sole criterion of social status, it is a powerful one. In many cases, the possession of wealth translates into a high social position and power. Wealth enables people to send their children to the most prestigious schools, buy homes in the best residential locations, and join prestigious social clubs. It enables access to political power through large campaign contributions to politicians, or it permits people to run for political office themselves.

The bases of prestige, or social honor, vary cross-culturally. Prestige may be based on race and ethnicity, family membership, and personal achievement, as well as on characteristics such as integrity or charisma. Not all wealth is an equal source of prestige. Illegally earned incomes generally carry less prestige than wealth from legitimate enterprises. Compare the prestige of El Chapo (Joaquín Guzmán Loera), the billionaire former leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel (currently in prison), and the billionaire investor Warren Buffet, sometimes referred to as the "Oracle of Omaha," or the prestige of Vladimir Putin, who some analysts claim is not only the richest politician but the richest person in the world (Åslund, 2019), with that of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), who was one of the poorest.

Occupation is a key source of prestige in most societies, both for its relation to income and the cultural values attached to different kinds of work, although different societies rank occupations differently. In the

Hindu **caste system**, occupations are ranked according to their level of spiritual purity or pollution, a concept formally absent from occupational rankings in the United States. Americans do, however, make some connections between prestige—or lack of it—and the cleanliness of various occupations, although this is not always voiced aloud. Dirty jobs such as trash removal are generally not prestigious jobs (Figure 8.4).

Figure 8.4 Societies often rank jobs according to their level of perceived purity of pollution. Dirty jobs are rarely high-prestige jobs. Garbage collection is absolutely crucial for current-day cities. However, garbage collectors are unlikely to have high social status.

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As technology and socioeconomic conditions are transformed, the value system that supports ranking occupational prestige may also change. In 18th-century Europe, surgery was performed by barbers and was a lower-class occupation, at least partially because it was dirty: Surgeons dealt in blood, pus, and bodily fluids. In contemporary North America, surgeons have a great deal of prestige, not only because they make a lot of money but also because surgery requires great skill and training. The cultural images of blood and filth that accompanied surgery in earlier eras have been replaced by images of purity and cleanliness.

China has undergone numerous shifts in the prestige ranking of different jobs over the past century. Before the Communist Revolution of 1949, China followed a Confucian value system, in which scholars were greatly honored. Workers in manual trades, particularly farming, had low status. After the Communist Revolution of 1949, these workers gained prestige, and during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976, scholars were explicitly ridiculed and despised. From the Revolution of 1949 until the economic reforms that began in the late 1970s, merchants and businesspeople had low prestige and were often targets of socialist contempt and even violence. However, since then, China has become one of the most economically powerful nations in the world. Its total economy was second only to the United States in 2021. The social prestige of business has risen accordingly.

Social scientists have long debated whether prestige or economic factors are more important in explaining the behavior of people in complex, stratified societies. Karl Marx argued for the primacy of economic or class interests while Max Weber, a German sociologist of the late 19th century, argued for the importance of status rather than economic interests. Whereas Marx thought that people were (or should be) most conscious of their class membership (their economic status), Weber believed that people may value prestige and the symbolic aspects of status even more than their economic position. Weber further argued that political action can be motivated by a group’s desire to defend its social position as well as, or even in opposition to, its economic self-interest, a position Marx called “false consciousness.” In the American South, for example, poor whites did not join poor Blacks in working to improve their common economic position because they were more committed to maintaining the prestige based on race than on economic improvement that might make all more equal. Another example is the many working-class people who vote for politicians who work against their economic best interests by supporting corporations and undermining workers' unions (Greenhouse, 2019) and arguing for tax laws that benefit the rich.

Class and Caste in Social Stratification

Anthropologists and sociologists frequently use the words *caste* and *class* to describe social stratification in state-level societies and some chiefdoms. Both classes and castes are hierarchically ranked social groups with differential access to wealth, prestige, and power. In other words, members of a class or caste share similar social and economic status. They may also share other aspects of culture such as similar education, the practice of similar rites and rituals, and similar belief systems. Viewed from this perspective, in states and chiefdoms, society is composed of a series of ranked classes or castes.

The critical difference between classes and castes is that, at least in theory, a **class** is a power, wealth, and prestige group based on achieved status, whereas a **caste** is a power, wealth, and prestige group based on ascribed status. To say that class membership is based on **achieved status** means that it is based on those aspects of identity society understands to be changeable during one's lifetime, such as education, wealth, marital status, and job title. To say that a caste is based on **ascribed status** means that it is based on those aspects of identity that are understood by a society to be the result of biology and birth and viewed as permanent, unchanging aspects of identity. This includes such things as race, ethnic identity, biological sex, religious identity, and spiritual purity. It is important to understand that what is seen as permanent and unchanging varies greatly from society to society, and virtually anything, from skin color to the belief that the bodies of some people contain a magical witchcraft substance, can be used to differentiate groups in society from one another.

In a **class system**, an individual's class membership is at least theoretically determined by achievement. Classes are in principle permeable. You may be born into one class, live most of your life in another, and die in a third. In a class system, how you use resources to acquire wealth, power, and prestige determines your class membership. Class members can marry members of other classes (and may move up or down in class status as a result).

In a caste system, social stratification is based on ascribed status and, at least in theory, social mobility is impossible. Each individual is a member of a hierarchically ranked caste. Caste membership is set by birth and understood as a permanent, unchangeable aspect of identity. People who are members of a caste are understood as physically embodying caste attributes. They are understood as being members of a caste because their being contains some fundamental, essential aspect of their caste. For this reason, anthropologists sometimes refer to caste as an essential system. It is important to understand that this does not mean it is a necessary system. Rather, it means that it is a system in which people are understood as having essences, central core elements of their being, and this understanding is used to rank them.

At least, in theory, individuals in a caste system may pursue wealth, different job opportunities, or education. However, none of these can change caste identity or, hence, social rank. In a caste system, people must marry members of their own caste, and their offspring are necessarily also members of that caste. We will explore caste at greater length later and give examples that will help to clarify these points.

Both caste and class are “ideal types,” useful intellectual tools to help us think about social organization. But societies are rarely organized only by class or by caste. Many societies are organized by both. For example, in medieval Europe, there were three “estates.” The first estate was the clergy, those who prayed; the second was the aristocracy, those who fought; and the third was the peasantry, those who worked. The aristocracy and peasantry were castes: Membership was by birth and was understood as being a permanent and, ultimately, a biological aspect of being (aristocratic “blue bloods” really did believe their blood was different and purer than that of other people). Peasants only married other peasants and aristocrats other aristocrats. Membership in the clergy, on the other hand, was achieved. Both aristocrats and peasants could, under the right circumstances, become members of the clergy. And, because the clergy was, at least in principle, celibate, no one could be born as a member of this group.

In reality, class and caste are probably never found in their pure form. There are no societies in which permanent, unchanging aspects of an individual’s identity such as family of origin, gender, and race play no role in their social ranking. Similarly, there are unlikely to be any societies in which at least some people do not struggle against membership in groups determined by such characteristics.

Elite classes and castes control the dominant ideology of society, backed by the force of arms when necessary. Most of the time, the combination of an ideological belief system and the force to compel those who would reject it serves to keep the caste and class structure stable. However, there is probably no society in which all members of subordinate classes or castes are happy with their positions. People use all sorts of techniques—from “passing” (claiming to be a member of a group other than the one you were assigned at birth) to insurrection—to change their class and caste positions. It’s good to keep in mind that although most people, most of the time, live in peace and more or less willingly accept their position in society, rebellions and revolutions are common in state societies. The demands of the oppressed for equality and justice are as old as hierarchical society itself.

SOCIAL CLASS IN THE UNITED STATES

The nature of class in the United States is hotly debated. Some analysts—and politicians—disparage the notion of class and deny class conflict. Other more realistic observers insist on the importance of social class and note that class is “America’s forbidden thought” (Blumberg, 1980).

Class in the United States and the idea of the American Dream intersect in interesting ways. The phrase was popularized by the early 20th-century historian James Truslow Adams (1878–1949). Adams wrote that the American Dream was the “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (Adams, 1931, p. 317). Adams’s idea of the American Dream affirms the importance of hierarchy in American life but suggests that social position is determined only by achievement and ability, denying the importance of factors such as family background, social position at birth, race, ethnicity, and gender.

In modern usage, the *American Dream* is a vague term that is part of U.S. political ideology. It almost always includes the idea that everyone in the United States can raise their status through education, hard work, and self-reliance. And this suggests that Americans should focus on individual achievement rather than enduring divisions between social classes.

The American Dream ideology depends on the cultural centrality of **social mobility**, the ability of people to move from one social stratum to another. At the same time, America defines itself as a middle-class society, and Gallup polls taken since 2000 show that the majority of Americans consistently identify themselves as middle class. Only 8% of Americans consider themselves lower class, and only 2% consider themselves upper class (Newport, 2017). Even more revealing, in 2015, in a poll of people with family incomes of $100,000 a year or more, 40% described themselves as upper or upper middle class, but 51% said they were middle class and 8% said they were lower middle class (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, a household earning $100,000 in 2019 was in the top one third of American households ranked by income, and as Table 8.1 shows, an income of a bit more than $131,000 placed a household in the top 20% of American households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Table 8.1 Household Income by Quintiles, 2021

	Average Household Income in Each Quintile	Upper Limits of Quintile	Percentage Share of Total U.S. Income[1]
Poorest quintile	$14,859	$28,007	3.0
Second quintile	$41,025	$55,000	8.2
Third quintile	$70,879	$89,744	14.0
Fourth quintile	$115,462	$149,131	22.6
Wealthiest quintile	$269,356	Unlimited	52.7
Wealthiest 5% of American households[a]	$480,236	$286,304 (lower limit of top 5%)	23.5

Note: An example of how to read numbers in this column: Households in the poorest 20% of the U.S. population, taken all together, received 3.0% of the total of all the income earned in the United States in 2021.

[a] This group is also included in the wealthiest 20% of households.

Source: Semega and Kollar (2022).

America's commitment to an ideology of social mobility based on achievement is an element in the U.S. understanding of itself as a middle-class nation. But the issues go further than this. In 2019, the lower limit of the top 5% of American households was about $250,000. Americans who make this much money should certainly think of themselves as financially well off. However, most are unlikely to think of themselves as rich. Depending on where they live, they may be very middle class. In Manhattan, an average two-bedroom apartment costs $5,748 a month. An annual household income of almost $210,000 is needed to support a rent that high (Kaneshina et al., 2021). Remember, that's not a luxury two bedroom, but only the average. If you wish to buy, the median price for an apartment or townhouse in Manhattan was $1.16 million at the end of 2021. Brooklyn was a bit cheaper at only $941,000 (Hughes, 2022). To be middle class in Manhattan requires being in about the 98th income percentile in America.

When Americans think about the rich, they tend to have images of palatial mansions, servants, and private jets. All of these are well beyond the means of almost all Americans. Living the Hollywood image of wealth probably requires personal fortunes well in excess of $10 million, and only about 1% of U.S. households have wealth like that.

Figure 8.5 When Americans think of wealth, they often picture luxury that only a very few of the wealthiest members of society can afford. This leads many people with incomes in the wealthiest 20% of the nation to think of themselves as middle class.

iStockphoto.com/Korisbo

On the other side of the equation, in 2020, more than one third of U.S. households had incomes of $50,000 or less (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). And about 37.2 million Americans were living in poverty (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2021). But, even these people are likely to have many of the trappings of the middle class. Almost 100% of poor households own a refrigerator and a television. Almost 80% have some air conditioning (Thompson, 2011). This does not, of course, change the fact that they are poor. It probably does help that many of them think of themselves as middle class.

Income Inequality in the United States

The common notion that almost everyone in the United States is middle class tends to camouflage the relatively high levels of income inequality in the nation. One conventional way of analyzing income is to divide all U.S. households into quintiles (ranked groups of 20%) and ask what income levels and percentages of income are held by different fifths of the households. Table 8.1 presents this information for the United States in 2019.

The chart shows the degree of household income inequality in the United States as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. Several indicators stand out. The average family in the top quintile makes $238,035, more than the combined average income of families in the first four quintiles ($14,522 + $39,139 + $66,006 + $103,917 = $223,584). The share of the national income made by the first through fourth quintiles, at 48.1%, is substantially less than the 52% share of income made by the wealthiest 20%. The wealthiest 5% of the nation take home 23.32% of the national paycheck, while the poorest 40% take home less than 12%.

However, this chart substantially understates the degree of economic inequality in the United States. This is because real wealth is not equal to income but rather is income plus assets. And the distribution of assets in the United States greatly favors the nation's wealthiest families (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 Wealth Inequality in the United States, 2021

Percentage Share of Wealth Held By

Wealthiest 1%	32.3
90th to 99th percentile	37.7
51st to 90th percentile	27.8
Bottom 50%	2.3

Source: Statistica (2022).

These tables show a high degree of wealth inequality in the United States. The wealthiest 10% of U.S. households control the overwhelming majority of wealth. However, even within this group, there is great inequity. The top 1% of households control almost one third of the wealth of the nation. On the other side of the wealth spectrum, we see that official statistics probably understate the amount of poverty in the United States. Officially, 11.4% of Americans lived in poverty in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). However, the tables show us that 20% of households have incomes of less than $27,088. Because the poverty threshold for two people living in a single household was $17,420, many of these households are not officially poor (ASPE, 2021). But, in most places in the United States, it’s very difficult to make ends meet at this income level. Further, about one in five American households has either zero or negative net worth: Their debts are greater than their assets (Ingraham, 2019). If they were to sell everything they owned and use it to pay their debts, they would still owe money. There is no money available for emergencies or financial shocks such as medical expenses, car repair, or the loss of a job. Many households in this category have members with steady incomes, people who consider themselves middle class. However, it is very easy for them to fall into poverty. Together, the tables show that the United States is probably best characterized as a middle-class and poor nation with a small and extraordinarily wealthy upper class.

Class Mobility in the United States

Gloria Castillo, 22, a child of undocumented immigrants, was married, had two children, and lived in a tough neighborhood in Dallas, Texas. She worked the night shift at the drive-through window at a highway

Burger King, from 10:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m., for $252 a week before taxes and received no health care benefits. To help make ends meet, she worked a second job, earning $150 a night for the hour and a half it took her to clean three bathrooms in a local bar. Her husband worked at an auto parts place during the day, so Gloria took the children, ages 7 and 8, for a fast-food breakfast before dropping them at school, returned home, slept until 2, picked up the kids, prepared their frozen-food dinners, put them to bed at 7, spent a few hours with her husband, and left for work. On Saturdays, she attended a community college, working toward a degree as a paralegal. “I got dreams,” she said (LeDuff, 2006).

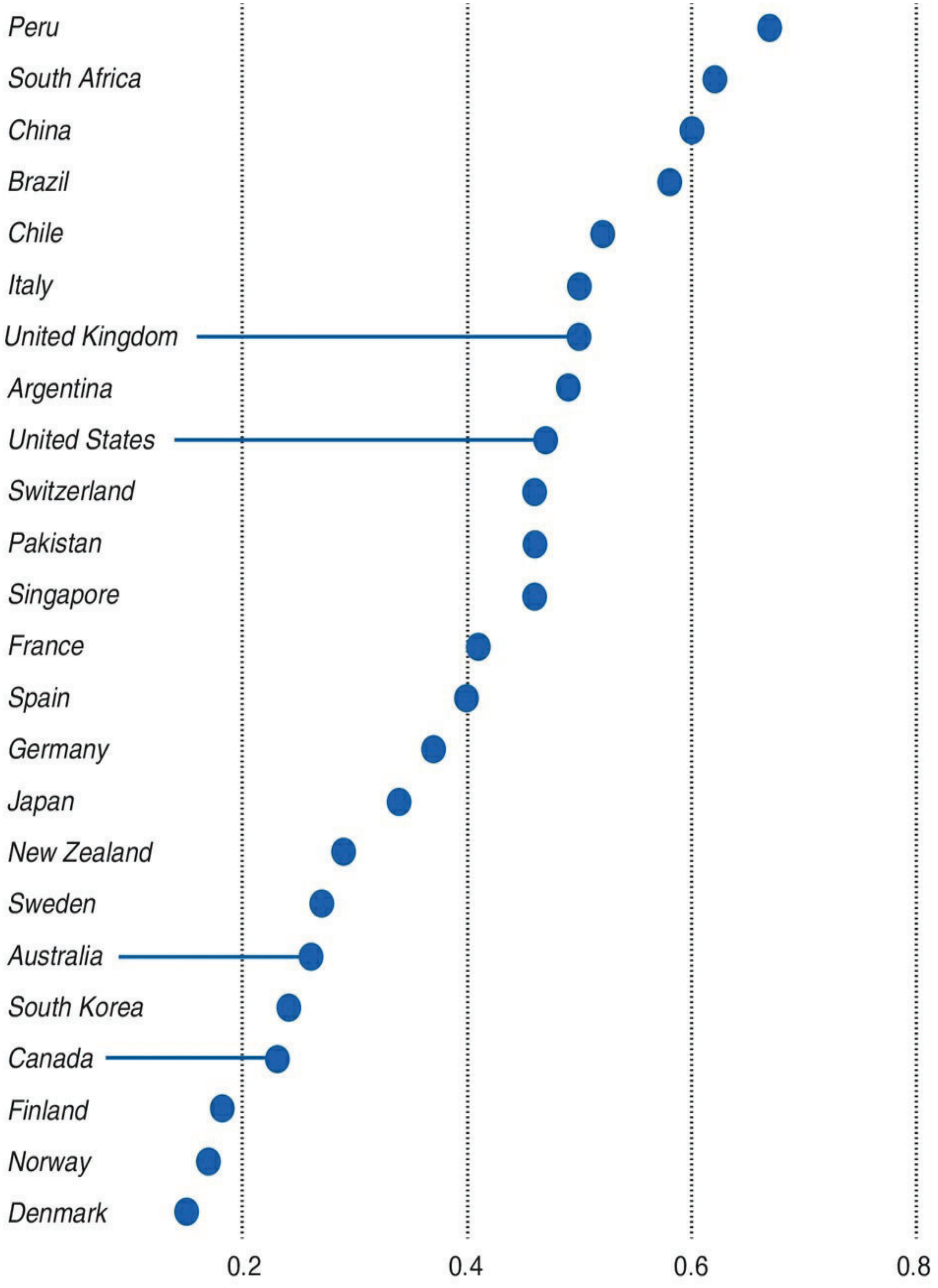
Gloria’s story is typical of many Americans. The notion that, regardless of their origin, people can improve their economic position and gain access to both wealth and prestige is a core American cultural understanding. Almost all American children are told that anyone can become president, and belief in the United States as a land of economic and cultural opportunity is deeply embedded in our culture. Of course, there is no question that some people do succeed in moving from poverty to great wealth. Oprah Winfrey was born in poverty, and Larry Ellison (the founder of Oracle software and the seventh wealthiest person in the United States in 2018) came from an economically marginal background. Further, there’s no doubt that the United States (and many other wealthy nations) attracts people from all over the world hoping for better, wealthier lives. However, what do the statistics actually say about the odds of social mobility in the United States?

The evidence is mixed. A 2017 report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago shows that intergenerational mobility was high for people born between 1942 and 1953 but declined after that. It was substantially lower for people who entered the job market after 1980 (Davis & Mazumder, 2017). A study by Juan Palomino and colleagues (2019) shows that intergenerational mobility is very low for the poorest and the wealthiest households but higher for middle and especially upper-middle households. About half of the income advantage of parents is passed on to their children. And the result of this is that the expected income of men born in the bottom 10% of the population is one third of the expected income of men born in the top 10% of the population (Mitnik & Grusky, 2015).

Intergenerational mobility is complicated by both location and race. A 2014 study by Chetty et al. shows that social mobility is much greater in some areas of the United States than in others. Economic mobility is lowest in the states of the Southeast, including Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas. It is highest in midwestern states such as Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. The West Coast and the northeastern states are between these two.

Recent studies also point to racial disparities in mobility. The children of Black and white families that have the same level of wealth experience different outcomes. The daughters of Black and white families at the same income level have similar earnings, with Black women earning slightly more than white women. However, the story is different for sons. The sons of white families have far higher incomes than the sons of Black families at the same income level. In other words, if we consider two families, one Black and the other white, and both families are wealthy and both have the same income, the daughters of both families are likely to earn approximately the same income, but the sons of the white family will earn much more than the sons of the black family (Chetty et al., 2018).

American culture also tends to portray the United States as offering more upward income mobility than other nations, but statistical studies do not support this assertion. A study of social mobility between generations in different nations shows that the United States compares poorly with many other wealthy nations (Figure 8.6). In the United States, parents pass on 50% to 60% of their earnings position to their offspring. This makes the United States similar to countries such as the United Kingdom, Argentina, Italy, and Switzerland but different from Denmark, Canada, South Korea, and Australia, where parents pass on only about 20% or less of their earnings position. Thus, there is far more intergenerational wealth change in these countries (both increasing and decreasing wealth) than in the United States (Corak, 2016).


Peru
South Africa
China
Brazil
Chile
Italy
United Kingdom
Argentina
United States
Switzerland
Pakistan
Singapore
France
Spain
Germany
Japan
New Zealand
Sweden
Australia
South Korea
Canada
Finland
Norway
Denmark
0.2
0.4
0.6
0.8

Description

Figure 8.6 Countries countries ranked by the strength of the relationship between father and son earnings. The position on the chart reflects the degree to which the earnings of fathers predict the earnings of their sons. Positions farthest to the left (Denmark and Norway) have the greatest intergenerational mobility and those farthest to the right (Peru and South Africa) have the least.

Source: Corak (2016, p. 52). https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways-SOTU-2016-Economic-Mobility-3.pdf

Although much of American cultural ideology focuses on hopes of upward mobility, downward mobility plays a strong role in our culture as well. About a third of Americans who are born in families between the 30th and 70th income percentiles will be downwardly mobile. Education, marital status, and drug use have particularly strong influences in determining who is downwardly mobile (Acs, 2011, p. 1). In times of economic prosperity, downward mobility tends to be invisible. People in the United States celebrate wealth with purchases of cars, houses, and other visible trappings of conspicuous consumption. They tend to hide economic failure for as long as they can. Anthropologist Katherine Newman (1999), an astute observer of downward mobility, emphasized that job loss entails not only economic decline but also a decline in prestige: Individuals who lose their jobs lose their place in society and often their sense of honor and self-esteem. Sally Maitlis (2020) notes that for many people, losing a job is “one of life’s most stressful events, coming close after bereavement, marital difficulties and personal injuries.”

In times of financial crisis, downward mobility becomes highly visible. In the recession of 2007–2009, many types of workers—factory employees, retail clerks, truck drivers, store managers, computer technicians, middle managers, engineers, architects, CEOs, and others—lost their place in what was once a secure middle or upper-middle class (Greenhouse, 2008).

The story of Janesville, Wisconsin, provides a good example of downward mobility. As presidential candidates, both Barack Obama (in 2008) and Donald Trump (in 2016 and 2020) visited Janesville, and both spoke of middle-class opportunity. However, the economy in Janesville was based on the General Motors plant there. When that closed in 2009, many middle-class dreams withered. Amy Goldstein (2017), reporting on Janesville from 2008 through 2016, told the story of the struggles of local families, emphasizing the effects of economic collapse on family life.

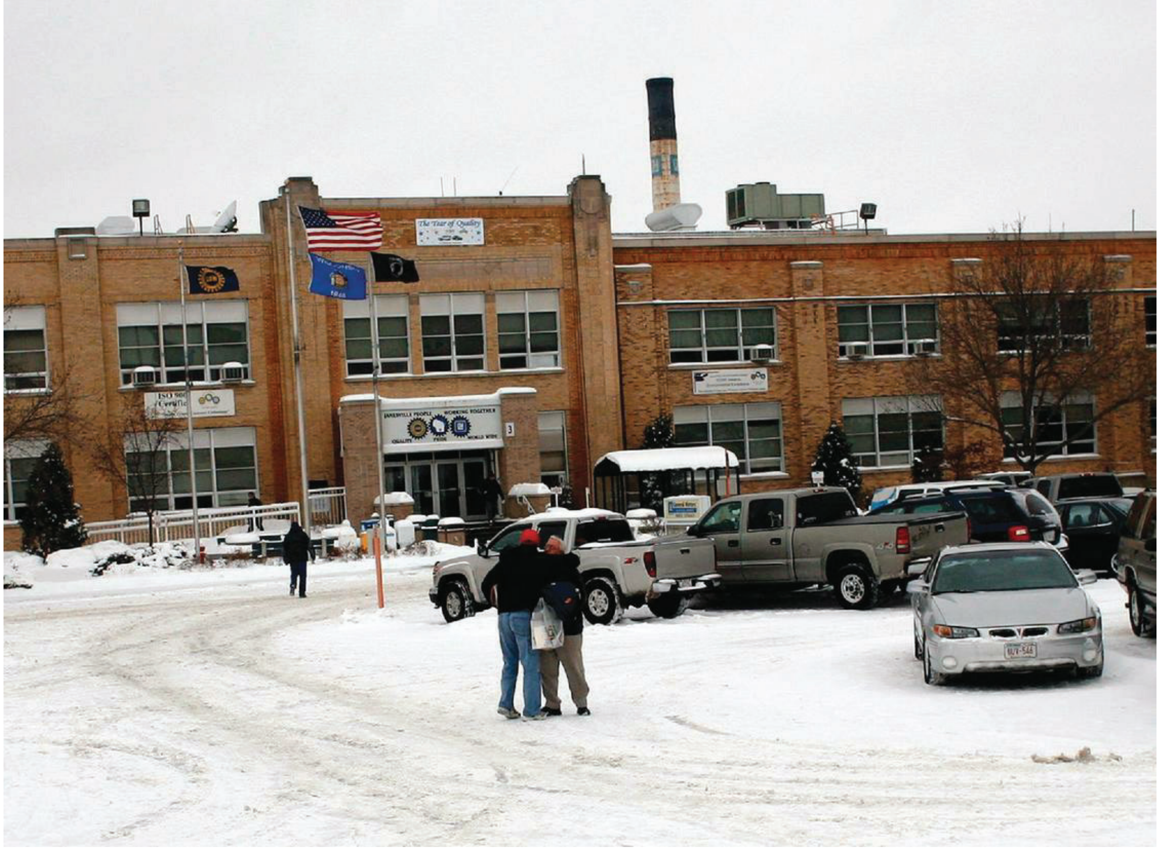


Figure 8.7 When factories close, the communities they support face economic collapse. In most cases, relatively well-paid factory jobs prove extremely difficult to replace.

Here, two workers hug as they leave the General Motors plant in Janesville, Wisconsin, after its final day of production.

Darren Hauck/Getty Images

Janesville’s residents were initially optimistic that the factory would reopen. However, most of the 9,000 people who lost their jobs when GM closed—14% of the city’s population—were still unemployed in 2010. They soon learned that it wasn’t easy for the newly unemployed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. One worker tried by taking a job as a guard at a local jail before finding work as a forklift driver. His teenage children took on several minimum-wage jobs. Many workers accepted transfers to factories outside Janesville. Some entered the local community college to retrain for other industries.

Goldstein’s data-based narrative contradicts the idea that things will work out if you work hard, learn new skills, adapt to a new situation, and make some lifestyle sacrifices. The residents of Janesville responded optimistically and energetically to their changed situation, but most did not succeed in triumphing over it. The experience of people in Janesville shows that the problem was not an unwillingness to work but a lack of economic opportunity.

Goldstein’s analysis of Janesville suggests that a crippled economy requires help from the federal government in the form of a wider social safety net. This partial solution ironically conflicts with the ideology that less government is the best government, a view held by a large part of both the rural and urban working class. The downward mobility experienced in places like Janesville is linked to the rise of populist and nationalist politics both in the United States and in Europe, although for right-wing populism, cultural, ethnic, and racial backlash also play an important role (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for intergenerational social mobility are still largely unknown. However, social scientists fear that the effects could be both strong and negative. Xi Song (2020) notes that COVID-19 has raised the cost of living for everyone, with days of work lost and unanticipated medical expenses. However, the burden of COVID-19 tended to fall disproportionately on the less well off. People who had professional jobs were, in most cases, able to transition to online work. In fact, many found that they preferred it. A survey in summer 2021 reported that up to a third of office workers say that they will not accept jobs where they can’t work remotely at least some of the time (Molla, 2021). At the same time, as the economy shut down in 2020, millions of low-paid employees in service industries were thrown out of work, and the unemployment rate rose to 14.8%, the highest since data collection began in the late 1940s (Congressional Research Service, 2021). As of January 2022, the unemployment rate has not fully returned to its prepandemic level.

Disproportional effects were amplified as families faced sending their children to school online. Families that can afford high-speed Internet and a high-quality device for each child can stay more engaged in education than those that cannot. Xi Song’s work showed that declines in family income when children are very young have long-term effects on adult earnings, persisting into middle age. College students probably fared somewhat better than younger students. However, college students too have missed out on both academic activities that would have helped them gain experience and social activities that would have forged connections and created networks. This too probably affected students from poorer backgrounds more than those from wealthier families. Writing about Britain, Lee Major and Stephen Machin (2020) express concern about the appearance of a COVID-19 generation, pushed “into a dark age of declining social mobility because of rising economic and educational inequalities.”

American Classes as Subcultures

Class differences in America underlie differences in lifestyle, occupational roles, values, social affiliations, leisure activities, religious beliefs, and political views that are strongly linked to residential segregation. Members of the wealthier classes live in neighborhoods with good access to excellent schools, grocery stores that carry high-quality foods, hospitals, professional facilities, and opportunities for leisure, such as health clubs and parks. The poor, on the other hand, often live in neighborhoods where the schools are failing, where good-quality grocery stores are so rare that these neighborhoods are sometimes called “food deserts,” and where access to medical care and places for leisure-time activities are scarce.

Poor neighborhoods and poor cities are also often subject to the worst effects of environmental pollution. In the United States, hazardous air pollution was at its worst in nonwhite, low-income communities. In 2015, the water supply in Flint, Michigan, one of the nation’s poorest cities, was shown to be contaminated with significant amounts of lead (Kennedy, 2016). Lead poisoning particularly affects children, leading to developmental delays and learning disabilities, which inhibit social mobility. A stark measure of the results of wealth inequality is that life expectancy rose for the wealthiest 20% of Americans between 1980 and 2010 but declined for the poorest 20%. And the difference in average life expectancy between poor and wealthy women widened from 3.9 years to 13.6 years.

In addition to material differences, social classes also differ in attitudes, behavior, consumption patterns, values, and social connections. The members of a social class tend to share similar life experiences, occupational roles, and other aspects of culture. Class status isn’t just income; how that income is spent counts too. Members of social classes spend their money in ways that confirm their class membership. This is, of course, particularly true of those with large amounts of disposable income.

Members of a social class also tend to associate more with one another than with people in other classes. Thus, the cultural and interactional dimensions of social class reinforce one another. Through interaction based on common residence and schooling, religious participation, voluntary associations, and other social institutions, people learn the lifestyle of their social class. Because lifestyle is an important part of sociability, informal and intimate social relationships such as friendship and marriage also tend to bring together people from the same social class. This partly explains why people tend to marry members of their social class.

The disparities in the culture of class are particularly evident in education. Universities and colleges provide education and opportunities for those who attend them. However, they are also critical nodes in people’s social networks. It is common for people to meet their partners in college and make friendships that last many years. Networks of alumni, social groups, and clubs provide connections that people often use throughout their careers. This makes higher education critical in both preserving inequality and offering the possibility of change.

Many, if not most, elite colleges seem to be more in the business of preserving inequality than promoting change. For example, at Harvard, 15% of students come from families in the top 1% of U.S. incomes and almost 70% come from families in the top 20%. At the same time, only 4.5% of Harvard students come from families with household incomes in the lowest 20%. But Harvard has less inequality than most other Ivy League schools. At Dartmouth, 21% of students are from the top 1% of wealth. There, you’re more likely to meet a student from the top 0.1% than from the bottom 20% of households. That top fraction accounts for 4.5% of Dartmouth students, while members of the lowest 20% in the United States make up only 2.6% of the student body (AACRAO, 2017).

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Activism for Homeless People

For many, homeownership is central to the American Dream, but the ability to own one’s home differs greatly among social classes. Most poor urban residents live in rental apartments, often owned by exploitative or uncaring landlords. Many poor urban renters have no understanding of how to maintain their legal rights to their apartments and have little access to the legal system. Some local urban governments are trying different approaches to this problem using the latest information technology and hiring tech-savvy college graduates to increase the chances of success for poor people in housing courts. In New York City, for example, IT specialist Dan Kass developed a mobile app, JustFix.nyc, which gives apartment renters tools to get information on building ownership and code violations, notifying landlords of repair issues, and fighting eviction notices (JustFix.nyc, 2019; Soria, 2015).

One critical aspect of the Great Recession was an increase in homelessness (Desmond, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Figure 8.8). Almost 50 years ago, anthropologist Elliot Liebow’s 1967 ethnography of “street corner men” in Washington, D.C., made homelessness visible. But contemporary engaged cultural anthropologists go further. According to Vincent Lyon-Callo (2004), an anthropologist who studies social services, changing the lives of homeless people means educating the public and engaging in political action. Lyon-Callo hopes to understand homelessness but also to move attention to its causes to the center of U.S. culture and politics. Lyon-Callo believes that most homelessness in the United States results from a cultural and political philosophy that embraces free markets and private initiative as the solution to social problems. He argues that most Americans have a “social services” orientation to homelessness. They believe the problem can be solved through charity or services aimed at reforming homeless people, who are seen as deviant or disabled. This understanding undercuts attempts to see homelessness as a result of systemic inequalities such as increasing unemployment, declining relative wages, and the exploitation of workers. Lyon-Callo argues that by distracting action from these issues, the social services orientation actually helps to maintain homelessness.

Figure 8.8 Homelessness is a problem in U.S. cities such as Los Angeles (shown here). Anthropologists such as Vincent Lyon-Callo work as advocates for the homeless.

iStockphoto.com/anouchka

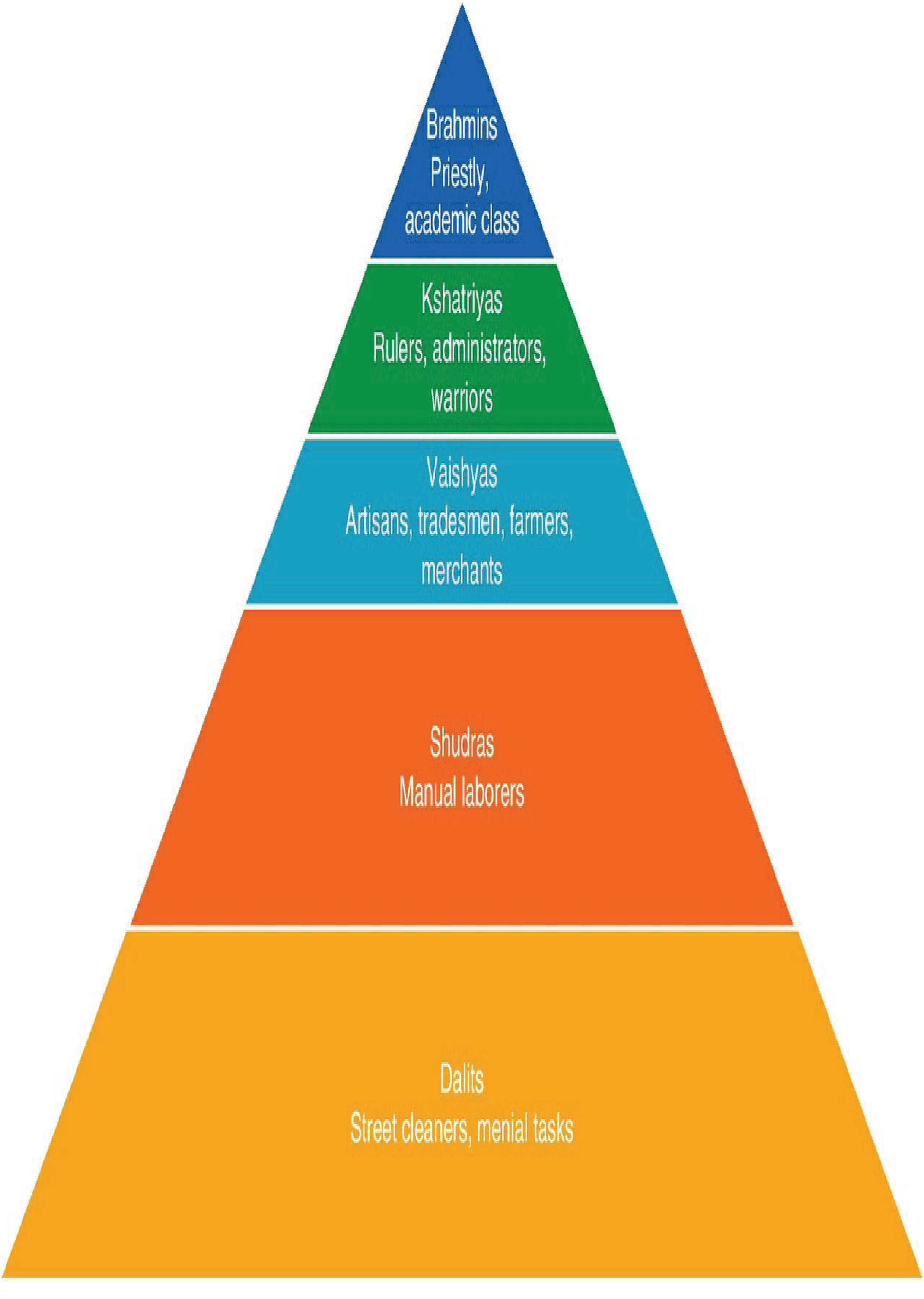
Lyon-Callo's emphasis on the structural causes of homelessness, such as lack of jobs and lack of housing, led to the creation of a winter-cot program in community churches, a living-wage campaign, and new job opportunities for the homeless. However, he argues that since homelessness is ultimately a political and economic problem, anthropologists must work in public political forums to address its root causes and end it. But there are problems. It is not clear that anthropologists and other social scientists agree on the root causes of homelessness. Even those who agree with Lyon-Callo note that the current social service approach at least offers a degree of immediate hope and help for homeless people. Fundamental social and economic change is a more distant hope.

CASTE SYSTEMS

In contrast to class systems, a caste system is based on birth, or ascribed status. In theory, individual movement between castes or marriage between individuals from different castes is not possible. Castes are socially ranked and characteristically associated with traditional occupations, which carry different degrees of purity or spiritual pollution and have different subcultures. A caste system, then, consists of ranked, culturally distinct, interdependent, endogamous groups, with rigidly maintained boundaries between the castes. Caste systems exist in many cultures, but caste is often identified with India, where it is deeply culturally and historically embedded and plays a central role in social stratification.

The Caste System in India

The Indian caste system is unique in its complexity, its relation to Hindu religious beliefs and rituals, and the degree to which the castes (or, more accurately, subcastes) are cohesive and self-regulating groups. There are four principal castes (*varnas*), ranked according to the ritual purity of their traditional occupations: Brahmins, who are priests and scholars; Kshatriyas, who are rulers and warriors; Vaishyas, or merchants; and Shudras, or menial workers and artisans. Below these four *varnas* is a fifth group, previously called untouchables, now called Dalits. Dalits perform occupations that are considered to be “unclean.” These include work such as cleaning, collecting waste, tanning and working with leather, and many other jobs. In some places, people who did these jobs were considered so ritually impure that their mere touch or, in some cases, even the touch of their shadow or seeing them was contaminating to members of higher castes (Sekhar, 2019).


Brahmins
Priestly, academic class
Kshatriyas
Rulers, administrators, warriors
Vaishyas
Artisans, tradesmen, farmers, merchants
Shudras
Manual laborers
Dalits
Street cleaners, menial tasks

Description

Figure 8.9

Most Indians do not understand themselves directly as a member of one of the five *varnas*. Rather, they understand themselves as belonging to groups called *jati. Jati* are often linked with specific historical occupations and specific geographic regions. For example, in Odisha state in eastern India, the Chasa are a *jati* of farmers, the Kamar are a jati of blacksmiths, the Dobha are a *jati* that washes and presses clothes, and the Karan are a *jati* of writers and record keepers in the royal courts. There are believed to be more than 3,000 different *jati* in India.

Jati are broadly understood as being identified with a *varna*. For example, the Chasa in Odisha are identified with the Shudra *varna* and the Dobha with the Dalit caste. However, in many cases, the relationship between *jati* and *varna* is very complex and *jati* may sometimes try to change *varna*.

Jati are further divided into named subcastes. These frequently have ruling counsels called *panchayats* that judge questions of religious rituals or local customs. *Panchayats* may also deal with matters such as breach of contracts, petty theft, or assault, as well as relations with other *jati*. There may be as many as 25,000 of these subcastes across India.

Only about 4% of Indians identify themselves as Brahmins. Another 26% identify with other high-caste groups. Most of the remaining 70% are low-caste people, principally Dalits (Figure 8.10), farm laborers, or people who claim no caste identity, though these are usually impoverished (Pew Research Center, 2021b).

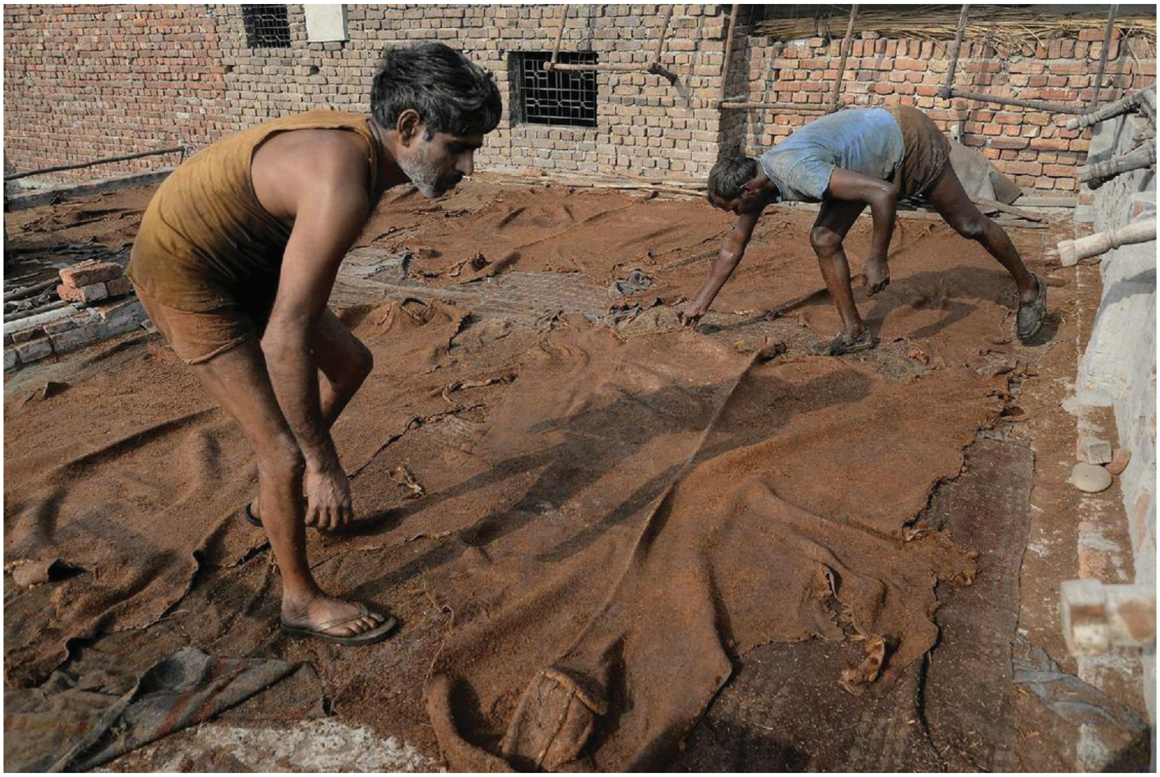


Figure 8.10 Almost 70% of the Indian population is composed of low-caste people. Chamers are a *jati* of leather workers. Chamers are Dalits and are considered by members of higher castes to be polluted.

SHAMMI MEHRA/AFP via Getty Images

Members of each *jati* are bound by a series of rules that govern the occupations they could hold, who they could marry, and many other aspects of daily life. These include what foods they may eat, whether or not they may smoke or drink, who they may socialize with, and what they may wear. Many rules concern food, purity, and pollution. In many cases, members of higher castes are forbidden from accepting food from members of lower castes since such food is considered polluted. Raj Pruthi notes that, for example, a member of the Brahman caste who accepted water, bread, and boiled vegetables from a Dalit would be immediately polluted by the action and could expect social rejection from other Brahmins. Pruthi notes that “with every drink of water, with every meal, and with every contact with another person, people must ratify the social hierarchy” (Pruthi, 2004, pp. 164–165).

Although the relationship between *jati* and *varna* may sometimes be vague, in traditional Indian villages, the hierarchical relation of *jatis* to each other was not. *Jatis* were acknowledged to be superior, inferior, or on the same level as one another. Relationships between *jati* were often governed by a system known as *jajmani*. In this system, members of castes were obligated to one another. Members of lower castes performed different kinds of work for members of upper castes and were entitled to receive food, other goods, and protection from them. The *jajmani* system integrated different *jati* with each village and helped maintain village self-sufficiency. Some authors have viewed *jajmani* in idyllic terms. For example, Prakash Tandon writes that the different castes in his village made “a multi-unit society, in which each caste had its functional place without oppression by a high caste” (1997, p. 46). However, in most places, *jajmani* was certainly a relationship in which higher-ranked groups were able to exploit and expropriate the labor of lower-ranked groups. Landowners gained a steady supply of available workers while the serving castes gained a relatively reliable source of subsistence. The lower castes, however, viewed themselves as exploited.

Soumya Mishra (2020) writes that *jajmani* “legitimizes oppression and prevents individuals from seeking to exercise their constitutional rights.” Ronki Ram (2021) points out Dalits in *jajmani* relationships had to accept what their landlords gave them and were made vulnerable by their inability to move from their territories, work for other landlords, or bargain for a better wage.

The hierarchical system of *jati* is also held in place by violence that members of higher-ranked *jati* inflict on members of lower-ranked *jati*. For example, the BBC reported that in 2018, a Dalit man was murdered because he married a member of a higher caste. He was killed in front of his wife in a plot arranged by her father (BBC, 2018). In April 2019, a group of upper-caste men beat a Dalit man to death because he sat on a chair and ate in their presence (Khare, 2019). These were not isolated incidents. Across India, almost 140,000 crimes against Dalits were reported from 2018 to 2020. Beatings, criminal intimidation, and rape were the most common crimes against Dalits (Economic Times, 2021; Jyoti, 2021).

Indian Caste, Religion, and Colonialism

The Indian subcontinent has long been home to many state-level hierarchical societies. The idea of four *varnas* can be traced back to Vedic society between 2,500 and 3,500 years ago. The *varnas* are found in religious texts such as the *Manusmerti* (or law of Manu), written more than 2,000 years ago. Some of the names of individual *jati* seem to date from this period as well. However, the fact that *varna* and *jati* are discussed in ancient religious literature tells us little about how caste was practiced hundreds or thousands of years ago.

There is much academic (and political) debate and conflict about the history and practice of caste. Some academics such as Nicholas Dirks (2001) and Sanyou Chakravorty (2019) claim that caste was either completely altered by or almost wholly a creation of British colonialism. They argue that as the British came to power in India, they confronted the problem of ruling a land of extraordinary diversity. There were thousands of different communities with an enormous variety of different religious practices and traditions. To make sense of this diversity, they imposed their ideas of religion and social organization on Indian society. They used the *Manusmriti*, a religious text that had only marginal significance to most of the population, and censuses that enumerated *jati*, arranged them in hierarchical order, and assigned people to them to reorganize Indian society. This worked because it was enforced by British power, and it reaffirmed the privilege of members of powerful social groups. The effect of British colonialism was to turn what had been a relatively flexible system of hierarchy into a rigid system of caste.

Other authors such as Susan Bayly (1999) and Ananya Chakravarti (2019) do not deny that British colonialism influenced the practice of caste. However, they use documentation, including travelers’ reports, business records, and literature, to show that caste hierarchies and rules existed hundreds of years before British colonialism. Bayly notes that “caste has been for many centuries a real and active part of Indian life” (1999, p. 3). Chakravarti (2019) writes that “scholarship amply document[s] caste as both material oppression and varna ideology. More viscerally, low caste [poets] speak to us, centuries later, of their poverty, their back-breaking labour, and the dishonour and loneliness of their social position.” Chakravarti argues that to deny the existence of caste before colonialism is an act of violence, erasing the oppression and suffering of vast numbers of people.

However we understand the intellectual debate about the history of Indian caste, it is clear that caste has been a basic aspect of life for most of the Indian population for at least two centuries. It remains an active and important force in current-day Indian life.

Indian Caste and Social Mobility

On the surface, it would seem that caste is an extremely rigid system of social hierarchy with no possibilities for social mobility. Indeed, its ideology is just that. Traditional Hindu religious belief holds that individuals occupy their social position based on the virtue of their actions in a previous life. Caste positions are determined by unchanging spiritual essence. Thus, mobility is impossible. However, the Indian caste system is no exception to the general rule that, in all hierarchical societies, people in low social positions struggle to achieve more status and power.

In India, we can think about social mobility in two dimensions: There is the movement of *jati*, which may rise or fall with respect to other *jatis*, and there is the ability of individuals and families to improve their social and economic position. Thus, social mobility can happen at three levels: the *jati*, the family, and the individual.

Historically, *jatis* have attempted to change their position in the hierarchy using several different techniques. These include warfare, providing service to rulers, Sanskritization, and politicization. One way for a group to advance in a hierarchical system of power is to use force to seize power from other groups. Theoretically, rulers in India are supposed to come from the Kshatriya *varna*, but in reality, rulers were those who took power, and these came from many different *varna* and *jati*. The Indian scholar and statesman K. M. Panikkar claimed that for over 2,000 years, every Indian royal family came from a non-Kshatriya *varna* (cited in Srinivas, 2003).

Service to royal courts (and, in some cases, the British East India Company) was also, in some contexts, a pathway to social advancement for entire groups of people. For example, Dominic Vendell (2020) describes how the Chitnis, members of a single family of the Kayastha *jati*, were able to gain benefits for themselves but also for other members of their *jati* through careful management of service to the Maratha royal state bureaucracy in the 18th century.

One of the most widely studied ways that *jatis* have attempted social mobility is through a process that M. N. Srinivas, among the most famous Indian anthropologists, dubbed “Sanskritization” after Sanskrit, the language in which many ancient Indian religious texts are written (Srinivas, 1952). Sanskritization is the process in which *jati* take on the ritual and social practices of higher-ranked *jati* to attempt to improve their own ranking. One successful example of this was the Yadava movement, a 19th and 20th-century social movement that merged several low-ranked northern Indian *jati* into a single group that claimed descent from Yadu, a king mentioned in several ancient Hindu texts. In the movement to Yadva identity, *jati* members gave up practices they viewed as humiliating and followed practices that linked them to higher ranked *jati* and *varna* (Jassal, 2012, pp. 213–214). In another example, the *Kanbis* were low-caste cultivators in Gujarat on the western coast of India. In the early 1900s, many of them moved to Kenya, where they acquired considerable wealth. They also began to take up Brahmanical caste rules, dropping practices that Brahmans considered impure, such as widow remarriage, eating meat, and group worship of a mother goddess. They substituted these with Brahmanical practices, including vegetarianism and Krishna worship. As they remigrated back to India, the group was renamed *Patidar* and was given higher status, both in the British conducted census and more general social respect (Chandra, 1997; Deshpande, 2000).

Unsurprisingly, Sanskritization does not always work. For example, the Camars of Agra were a Dalit *jati* of leatherworkers and shoemakers who became more prosperous due to global demand for leather shoes. As their wealth increased, the Camars outlawed eating meat and adopted some higher-caste rituals. They began to claim they were members of a higher *varna*, the *Kshatriyas*. However, this claim was rejected by the high castes, who maintained the traditional caste boundaries limiting social interaction, including marriage. Subsequently, the Camars tried a different strategy: They converted to Buddhism—which put them outside the Hindu caste system altogether (Lynch, 1969).

In addition to group mobility, individual mobility is possible as well. Although *jatis* are defined partly by the specific work that their members do, historically it was not inevitable that all members had the same jobs. There was always a diversity of employment. The current-day economy greatly increases this diversity, presenting many jobs that offer possible change and advancement for individuals.

One major engine of change and possible advancement connected with employment is urbanization. India remains a mostly rural society. In 2020, only 35% of Indians lived in cities.[1] However, in 1960, only 18% of India was urbanized, so there is a very substantial rural to urban movement (World Bank, n.d.-b). In a small village, it is hard for an individual to obscure or change their identity. Everyone is likely to know who they are. However, in a large city, caste-based practices of purity and pollution are harder to maintain. Students of different castes sit next to one another in school, and access to many jobs is determined by ability rather than caste (Jah, 2019). It is easier to change professions and easier to pass as a member of a different *jati* than one was born to. Additionally, there are religious communities such as Buddhists and Christians who, at least in theory, do not believe in the importance of caste. However, life in the city is hard for most low-casted people. Indian cities have some of the largest slums in the world. The World Bank estimated that in 2018, more than 35%

of India’s urban population lived in slums (World Bank, n.d.-a). In Mumbai alone, there were at least 6.5 million slum dwellers (The Borgen Project, 2018 Figure 8.11).

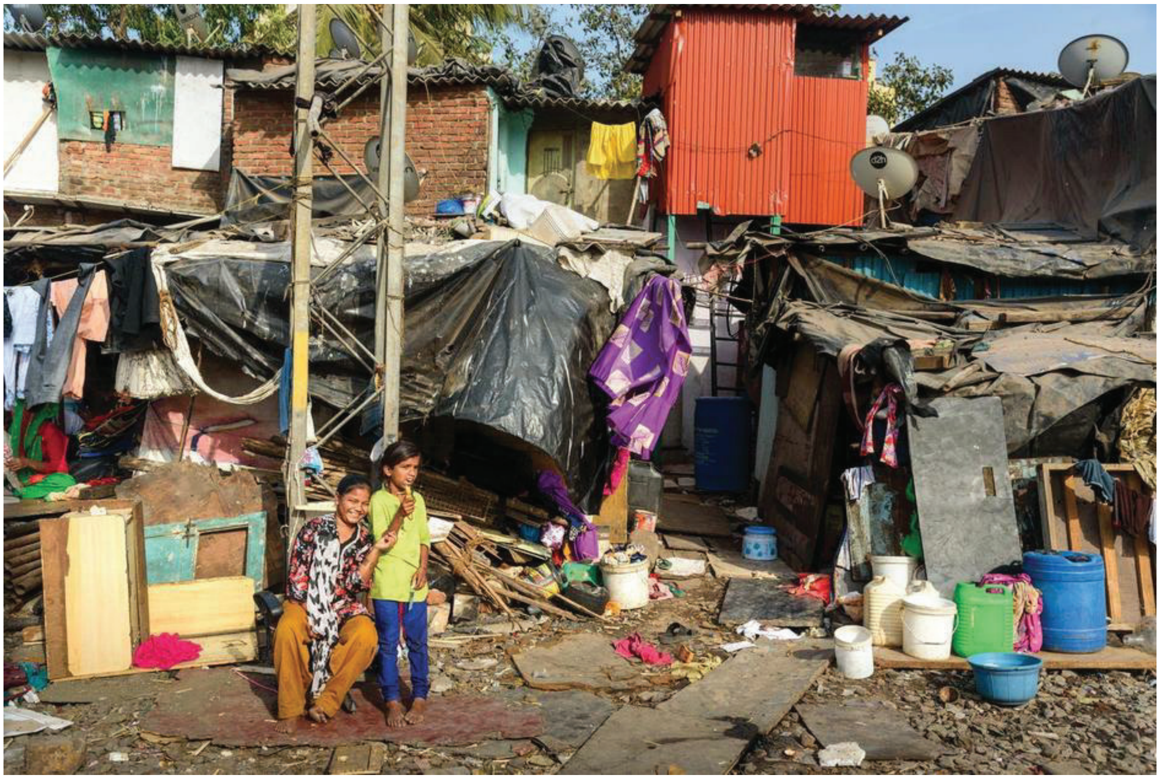


Figure 8.11 There are at least 6.5 million slum dwellers in Mumbai, India, alone. Here a woman and child are shown in the Dharavi slum, one of Mumbai’s largest.

iStockphoto.com/Elena Odareeva

There have been some spectacular economic success stories. For example, Rajesh Saraiya (born, 1969) is the CEO of Steel Mont, a company based in Germany that trades metals and other products. Saraiya is the first Dalit billionaire. He came from a middle-class family and studied aeronautical engineering in Russia (NDTV, 2011). Ashok Khade (born, 1956), the CEO of DAS Offshore, a company that helps fabricate offshore oil rigs and other infrastructure, grew up in deep poverty. He wanted to be a doctor but ended up working on the docks in Mumbai (Nadig, 2011).

However, the success of a small number of Dalits tells us little about the chances of social mobility for the many. And here the prospects are far grimmer. Moving to urban areas may allow members of lower-ranked *jati* freedoms that they did not have in rural locations, but most still have a very difficult time succeeding. The story of Ovindra Pal is much more typical than those of Saraiya or Khade. Despite having a master’s degree in history from a major Indian university, Pal was unable to find work related to his studies and followed his father as a skinner of dead animals, one of the lowest prestige occupations (Rai, 2016).

Despite the ability of some people to get ahead, social mobility in India remains very low. India ranks number 76 on the World Economic Forum’s Global Social Mobility Index, far behind countries such as Canada and the United States (numbers 14 and 27, respectively), but also behind countries such as China (number 45), Brazil (number 60), and Paraguay (number 69) (World Economic Forum, 2020). A child whose parents’ income is in the bottom 20% of the Indian population has only a 3% chance of rising to the top 20% of the nation but a 52% chance of remaining in the bottom 20%. If we look only at people from lower castes, the statistics are worse: Only 2% of those from families in the lowest 20% move to the wealthiest 20% and 58% remain in the lowest quintile (Chapman, 2020). Divya Vaid (2014, p. 400) writes, “Nowhere is the persistent congruence between castes and occupations or the lack of mobility more starkly evident than in the context of the Dalits.” Another study found that a professional’s son was 50 times more likely to be a professional than a laborer's son was to become a professional (Iverson & Kunal, 2017).

Caste in Current-Day India

India achieved independence from Britain in 1947. Its constitution was written by a committee chaired by B. R. Ambedkar, an important jurist and social reformer who was born into a Dalit caste. Article 17 of the constitution outlawed the status of untouchability and provides for punishment for discriminating against lower castes. Despite this, in recent surveys, more than a quarter of rural Indians openly reported practicing untouchability, and even more said they would not allow a Dalit into their kitchen.

The constitution and amendments to it created a reservation system, a type of affirmative action that tries to ensure that almost 60% of jobs in government, educational institutions, and legislatures are reserved for Dalits and members of other impoverished and oppressed groups. This system has had mixed success. It has strong popularity across much of India, and there is good evidence that it has led to gains for many people in India’s oppressed groups, increasing educational achievement and access to jobs. However, it has also encouraged widespread cynicism among many Indians, who see reservations as political favors to be handed out rather than as an effort to create a more just society. It is certainly true that many groups have tried to game the system, with castes such as the now relatively wealthy *Patidars* lobbying to be labeled as “backward” and thus be entitled to reserved positions. By some estimates, 80% of Indians have some claim to eligibility for these positions. Further, high-caste people have a virtual lock on the top positions. In 2021, only 4 of the top 89 civil service jobs in India were held by non-high-caste Hindus. The pervasiveness of the hold of caste on elite positions is shown by the fact that, in theory, Indian Catholics reject caste, but in 2021, only 2 of the 35 Indian cardinals and archbishops were from families of Dalit origin (Lee, 2021; The Economist, 2021).

Opinion surveys and other measures show the way that caste persists in the thinking of many in India. A 2021 poll of attitudes about caste conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed interesting patterns. On the one hand, the majority of poll respondents in lower castes said they did not perceive discrimination against them. But a strong majority of everyone polled said that all or most of their friends were members of their own caste. Further, almost two thirds of the respondents said that it was crucial to stop intercaste marriages. More than two thirds of Indians said that they would accept a Dalit neighbor (Pew Research Center, 2021a). However, this statistic sits uneasily with the fact that Dalits are often denied access to housing based on their caste identity or forced to rent housing at unfair terms (Banerjee et al., 2015, Figure 8.12). Sixty percent of Kolkata’s neighborhoods have no Dalits at all. The number is even higher in Rajkot, a city of 2 million in Gugajrat, where 80% of neighborhoods have none (Mandal, 2020; Bharathi et al., 2018).

Cast out Caste
National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights

Figure 8.12 The Indian constitution provides punishment for discrimination against lower castes, but caste discrimination remains common nonetheless. Here, a Dalit woman wears a “cast out Caste” headband as she demonstrates in favor of programs to improve economic conditions for Dalits.

INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/AFP via Getty Images

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have pursued a nationalist program called Hindutva. They seek to define India as a Hindu nation and have encouraged discrimination and even violence against the almost 20% of the nation that is not Hindu. The BJP’s anti-Muslim rhetoric has been particularly fierce, but attacks on Christians and other religious minorities have been increasing as well. Theoretically, the goal of these attacks is to isolate and demonize minorities so that a Hindu state can be established (note, NOT reestablished) (Deutsche Welle, 2022; Werleman, 2021). More practically, the attacks may simply serve to maintain and reinforce the power of the BJP.

Hindutva relies on imagining all Hindus as culturally united and defined against Muslims and members of religious minorities. This call to Hindu solidarity, however, has not led to the lessening of distinctions and prejudice between castes. The BJP has supported lower-casted groups against members of upper castes when those upper castes were opposed to BJP power. But where the BJP has the support of upper castes, it has reinforced rather than diminished caste differences. The BJP has no meaningful social program to reduce caste differences or support lower-casted people (Wankhede, 2019). The government Modi formed in 2019 was made up overwhelmingly of members of dominant castes, and statements by BJP politicians supporting caste dominance are common. For example, in 2019, the speaker of the Indian parliament said that the “Brahmin community always works toward guiding all other communities … hence, Brahmins are held in high regard in society by virtue of their birth” (cited in Jaffrelot, 2021).

As in the United States, COVID-19 has taken a high toll on India. Hundreds of millions of students were out of school in 2020 and 2021. India had hoped young people would drive its economy, but the failure of education during COVID-19 has put this in doubt. The World Bank estimates that India will lose as much as $440 billion as a result of the pandemic. This is almost certain to increase inequality.

Caste and caste prejudice not only continues to thrive in India, but it is also present in the South Asian community in the United States as well. Several current lawsuits allege caste discrimination against Dalits in America, including one that claims that a Hindu temple lured 200 low-caste workers to New Jersey to build a temple and paid them as little as $1.20 an hour (Krishnan, 2021). In a 2016 survey of Dalits in the United States, 25% said they had experienced verbal or physical assault based on their caste, and 60% had experienced caste-based derogatory jokes or comments (Equality Labs, 2018). In January 2022, the California State University system became the first major U.S. university system to add caste discrimination to its antidiscrimination policy (Venkatraman, 2022)

Conclusion: Unequal Inequalities and the Future

In the 19th century, Karl Marx, and others, dreamed of a truly classless and casteless society. They envisioned a world in which anyone could truly do anything and in which no meaningful, permanent inequalities existed. Their dreams were utopian, and 20th-century attempts to put them into practice were disastrous. Conservatively, tens of millions died as governments attempted to enforce universal equality in the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, and other places. Even at this enormous price, the results were not the equality and freedom envisioned by the 19th-century utopians but rather societies of poverty and oppression. History and social science give us little reason to believe that class and inequality can truly be eliminated in large-scale highly complex societies. But that doesn’t mean we can’t do better.

Anthropology shows us that not all inequality is the same. Societies that have inequality vary in terms of how much inequality is present, the percentage of wealth and power controlled by the elites, and, critically, the degree to which a change in social and economic position is possible, particularly for those at the bottom of the social ladder. Recently, David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021) have attempted to show archaeological data that demonstrate the existence of large-scale societies characterized by relative equality and lack of a strong central government and expropriating elites. Some of Graeber and Wengrow’s interpretations might be suspect, but together, as Anthony Kwame Appiah (2021) notes, they make a compelling argument against historical determinism: the idea that our societies had to turn out the ways they did, with the high levels of inequality they have. Graeber and Wengrow’s work gives us hope that we can enact policies and find ways of living together that are both freer and more equal than those we currently have.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: THE GIG ECONOMY

Before the Great Recession of 2009, David Loechner earned $65,000 a year managing a truck rental company, and his wife, Brenda, earned $24,000 working two part-time jobs. They lived in a $1,000-a-month furnished apartment and thought of themselves as solid, middle-class citizens. When the recession hit, Loechner lost his job, and it took over a year to find another—working as a janitor in a supermarket, earning $8.60 an hour. His wife became too depressed to work. The Loechners eat a lot of soup and shop online at free thrift sites. “We’re no longer middle class,” Brenda says (Brubaker, 2012). The effect of job loss places people like the Loechners in an anxious position. Many families who considered themselves middle class find it difficult to maintain not only their lifestyles but also their middle-class identities.

One of the ways people like the Loechners get by is by taking low-paid service work as part of the expanding **gig economy**, the labor market that consists of short-term, freelance work rather than permanent jobs. The gig economy increasingly relies on **platform capitalism**, a business model in which companies provide websites (platforms) that connect freelance workers and consumers while acknowledging only minimal responsibility to either group. Uber, Airbnb, Google, and Facebook are all examples of platform capitalist businesses.

Alissa Quart's book *Squeezed* describes the stress of families who belong to what she calls the "middle precariat." Members of the middle precariat are those who "believed that their training or background would ensure that they would be properly, comfortably middle class" but whose lives have not worked out that way (Quart, 2018, p. 6). Increasingly, they find that much of what was taken for granted in earlier generations, including homeownership, adequate health care, and comfortable retirement, is now out of reach. Housing costs have risen enormously, as have the costs of health care and college education. Wages have stagnated. Union membership has severely declined, and in many cases, technology has replaced human workers.

Matt Barry, a public high school history teacher in San Jose, California, for 9 years, is an example of a middle precariat member. Barry needed to make extra money to prepare for the birth of his first child. So, he took on a part-time job driving for Uber. He spent his after-school hours and weekends as a driver, grading papers in between rides. Barry and his wife, also a teacher, earned $69,000 each, which would make them solidly middle class if it weren't for the wealth explosion in nearby Silicon Valley. This put house prices out of reach and increased other expenses. Many of Barry's Uber passengers thought teachers were doing well, but Uber knew better. They started a program to encourage teachers to moonlight as chauffeurs, using the motto "Teachers: Driving Our Future." Quart says that Uber's teacher-driver campaigns are part of a "twisted Silicon Valley fantasy: low taxes, good schools, and teachers who drive you home after your expense-account meal with a venture capitalist” (Quart, 2018, p. 149).

Andy Newman (2019), a reporter for the *New York Times*, describes his experiences as a deliveryman for Uber Eats, DoorDash, and Postmates in New York City. In New York, as in many other cities around the world, delivery people for these services use bicycles. Newman says the job is “a game of real-life speed chess played across the treacherous grid of the city.” Injuries are common, and, in 2018, one third of the delivery cyclists missed at least one day of work because of them. In 2019, four New York City delivery cyclists were killed in crashes with cars. Nevertheless, many workers find working for these companies better than working directly for restaurants. The apps can pay better and give workers more freedom. However, workers are also exploited. Companies may offer minimal or no compensation for time spent waiting or for injuries. In some cases, they may offer a guaranteed minimum for each job but then keep a portion, sometimes all, of any tip received. Most delivery app couriers are not guaranteed any wage at all, but those Newman talked to said they earned hourly wages in the mid-teens, close to the city’s minimum wage of $15 per hour. Newman’s earnings added up to just about $10 an hour, $5 under the city’s minimum wage.

Figure 8.13 An Uber Eats bicycle delivery driver in Turin, Italy.

Nicolò Campo/LightRocket via Getty Images

In *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley From Building a New Global Underclass* (2019), anthropologist Mary Gray and computer scientist Siddharth Suri, both of whom are senior researchers for Microsoft, examine the human labor behind artificial intelligence (AI). AI is not sophisticated enough to operate without additional human labor. Services like Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) are designed to use people to assist AI in jobs such as analyzing photographs, describing injuries, or transcribing business cards. Some of the tasks may be quite complicated. For example, one MTurk task asked almost 1,500 people to evaluate different levels of compensation for participation in a medical experiment (Samuel, 2018). Because the work of these individuals is invisible to the people who use the services they provide, Gray and Suri call them “ghost workers.” Ghost workers are paid by the task, and most of the time, the rates are extremely low, usually under 10 cents per task. Many pay only a penny. Amazon originally created MTurk for its own use. However, MTurk and other similar services are used by an enormous range of corporations and other entities: everyone from university-based social science researchers to *Fortune* 500 companies.

Amazon says MTurk has half a million registered workers. Other analysts have concluded that, at any moment, between two and five thousand workers are active on MTurk. Many workers are based in the United States, but thousands are located throughout the world, particularly in India. Work on MTurk can be profitable, but only 4% of MTurk workers make more than $7.25 an hour (Gray & Suri, 2019, p. 12). A *New York Times* reporter who tried his hand made $0.97 an hour (Newman, 2019).

So why are people willing to do such low-paid work? Gray and Suri point out that the workers they interviewed were united by their hopes. They hoped to be able to control their jobs, stay close to family, avoid hostile environments, and gain experience. However, very frequently, other better options were not available to them. Sometimes, they were constrained by responsibilities such as the need to care for young children or aging relatives. Sometimes, they lived in communities where there was little meaningful work available. As one of the workers Gray and Suri (2019, p. 12) interviewed said, the pay may not be great, but it “is a meaningful amount when your previous income was zero.”

As Gray and Suri point out, in some ways, the gig economy is nothing new. Industrialized production has always relied on part-time and extra workers whose labor is often invisible and usually undervalued. Gray and Suri raise important questions about what kinds of protections such workers need and what governments can do to better the conditions of gig workers. We need to carefully consider the rights of those who are employed through platform capitalist companies, as well as the rights of those who purchase goods and services through them. Gray and Suri’s prediction that gig work will account for an ever-greater share of the economy suggests both that these will be critical issues in the years to come and that the gulf between the rich and poor will continue to widen.

You Decide

1. Have you ever worked in the gig economy? If so, what were the good and bad parts of your experience?
2. Should we resign ourselves to the continued growth of the gig economy or fight for the right to full-time labor with benefits to and protections for workers?
3. What does the American Dream mean to you, and do you believe that you will achieve it? What are your reasons for your optimism or pessimism? What role is the gig economy likely to play in it?

SUMMARY

1. What contrasts does a global perspective highlight in terms of social stratification? Global comparisons illustrate that economic inequality is characteristic of all the world's nations. This is evident in the differences in access to material assets, adequate and abundant food, easy access to fresh water and electric power, adequate access to medical care, and the ability to educate children. This is evident in differences in access to land, adequate food, material goods, education, medical care, and many other services.
2. What are the differences between functionalist and conflict theories of social stratification? The functionalist theory holds that social stratification benefits the whole society because it motivates people to undertake all the jobs necessary for society to survive. Conflict theory emphasizes the conflicts within stratified societies as different social strata, with opposing interests, clash with one another over goals and resources.
3. Define the major dimensions of social stratification, and explain how they relate to other aspects of culture and society. The major dimensions of social stratification are power, wealth, and prestige,

which are closely tied to occupation and income. The particular value system of a culture shapes how these factors interact to determine where a person is placed in the stratification system.

4. What are the main features of the class system in the United States? The culture of the United States emphasizes the idea that one can and should improve one’s life chances and material wealth. Although many Americans dismiss the importance of class in the United States, there are important material and other differences in the different social classes. Inequality between social classes is increasing, as is downward mobility.
5. What are some of the main features of economic inequality in the United States? While the American ideal is a middle-class society, there are huge differences between both income and assets held by the highest and lowest quintiles.
6. What are the main features of class mobility in the United States? The belief in upward social mobility is a core American value. The evidence for this belief is mixed, and it appears that upward mobility is declining. In addition, upward mobility is contingent on geographical location, race, and gender, as well as other factors.
7. In what ways are classes subcultures? Classes as subcultures incorporate similarities in occupation, neighborhood, educational opportunities, and numerous other characteristics. People tend to both socialize and marry within their class.
8. How have anthropologists worked to help alleviate homelessness? Anthropologists such as Vincent Lynn-Callo have argued that the principal causes of homelessness include unemployment, declining wages, lack of affordable housing, and lack of access to health care. Therefore, efforts to address the issue must be focused on economic and political solutions rather than on attempts to reform the homeless or provide charity to them.
9. What are the main differences between a class system and a caste system? In a class system, social position is ideally achieved. People can move between social classes. In caste systems, social position (caste) is largely ascribed (based on birth), and caste boundaries are sharply defined by prohibitions on intercaste marriage and other restrictions.

10. What are the main characteristics of the Indian caste system, and how is it changing? In India, caste distinction is embedded throughout the society and in the Hindu religion. There are four ranked castes. Below these are the Dalits, who perform “unclean” work.
11. What is platform capitalism, and how has the gig economy impacted society? Platform capitalism is a business model in which companies connect workers and consumers while acknowledging only minimal responsibility to either group. Platform capitalism provides benefits to both workers and consumers but often at the price of low wages, no job security, no guarantees of service, and increasing gaps between the wealthy and poor.

Key Terms

achieved status (p. 222)

ascribed status (p. 222)

caste system (p. 221)

caste (p. 222)

class system (p. 222)

class (p. 222)

conflict theory of social stratification (p. 219)

functionalism (functionalist perspective) (p. 217)

functionalist theory of social stratificatoin (p. 217)

gig economy (p. 238)

life chances (p. 219)

platform capitalism (p. 238)

social mobility (p. 223)

social stratification (p. 217)

wealth (p. 220)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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The vertical axis represents the names of the 24 countries. The horizontal axis ranges from 0 to 0.8 in increments of 0.2.

The data from the graph is given in the table below. Values are approximate.

Name of country	Intergenerational mobility
Peru	0.68
South Africa	0.64
China	0.6
Brazil	0.59
Chile	0.54
Italy	0.5
United Kingdom	0.5
Argentina	0.49
United States	0.47
Switzerland	0.46
Pakistan	0.46
Singapore	0.46
France	0.41
Spain	0.4

Germany	0.38
Japan	0.37
New Zealand	0.3
Sweden	0.29
Australia	0.27
South Korea	0.26
Canada	0.23
Finland	0.19
Norway	0.18
Denmark	0.17

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From bottom to top the segments are labeled “Dalits: Street cleaners, menial tasks”; “Shudras: Manual laborers”; “Vaishyas: Artisans, tradesmen, farmers, merchants”; “Kshatriyas: Rulers, administrators, warriors”; and “Brahmins: Priestly, academic class.”

9 RACE AND ETHNICITY

People show a wide diversity of physical characteristics. However, there are no distinct biological races of people. People can be found who show almost any imaginable combination of characteristics. No consistent scientific system for racial classification has ever been discovered.

iStockphoto.com/funky-data

Learning Objectives

9.1 Restate the fallacies of the idea of biological race.

9.2 Explain the ways that ideas of race are linked to culture and history.

9.3 Describe some of the history and current practice of race in the United States.

9.4 Summarize the race system of Brazil and compare it to that of the United States.

9.5 Analyze the nature of ethnicity and its relationship to the nation-state.

9.6 Distinguish critical aspects of ethnicity in the United States.

9.7 Relate race and ethnicity to politics, practices, and outcomes surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Race and ethnicity are among the most compelling facets of life in the United States and many other places. Historic patterns of both forced and free migration as well as the emergence of the nation-state have created a world of complex and interlocking racial and ethnic identities. These are often closely associated with the distribution of wealth and power both within and between societies. In this chapter, we explore the history and practice of the idea of race with an emphasis on the United States and Brazil. We then turn to an examination of ethnic identity both in the United States and elsewhere.

RACE AND BIOLOGY

The assumption that the range of human diversity is best understood as a small number of biologically based races is a particularly meaningful aspect of culture in the United States and throughout much of the world today. The term **race** is used to classify people based on *perceived* physical differences that are believed to imply a wide variety of hereditary differences. From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, many scientists struggled to show that human races were both biologically real and hierarchically ranked. This effort failed but had many horrific consequences (Figure 9.1). In the early and mid-19th century, false race science was used to support African slavery. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was used to exclude Chinese and Southern Europeans from immigrating to the United States. In the mid-20th century, it was behind the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany in World War II. And, in the United States in the postwar period, it influenced immoral studies such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment—a research project in which experimenters knowingly denied treatment to African American men infected with syphilis.[1]

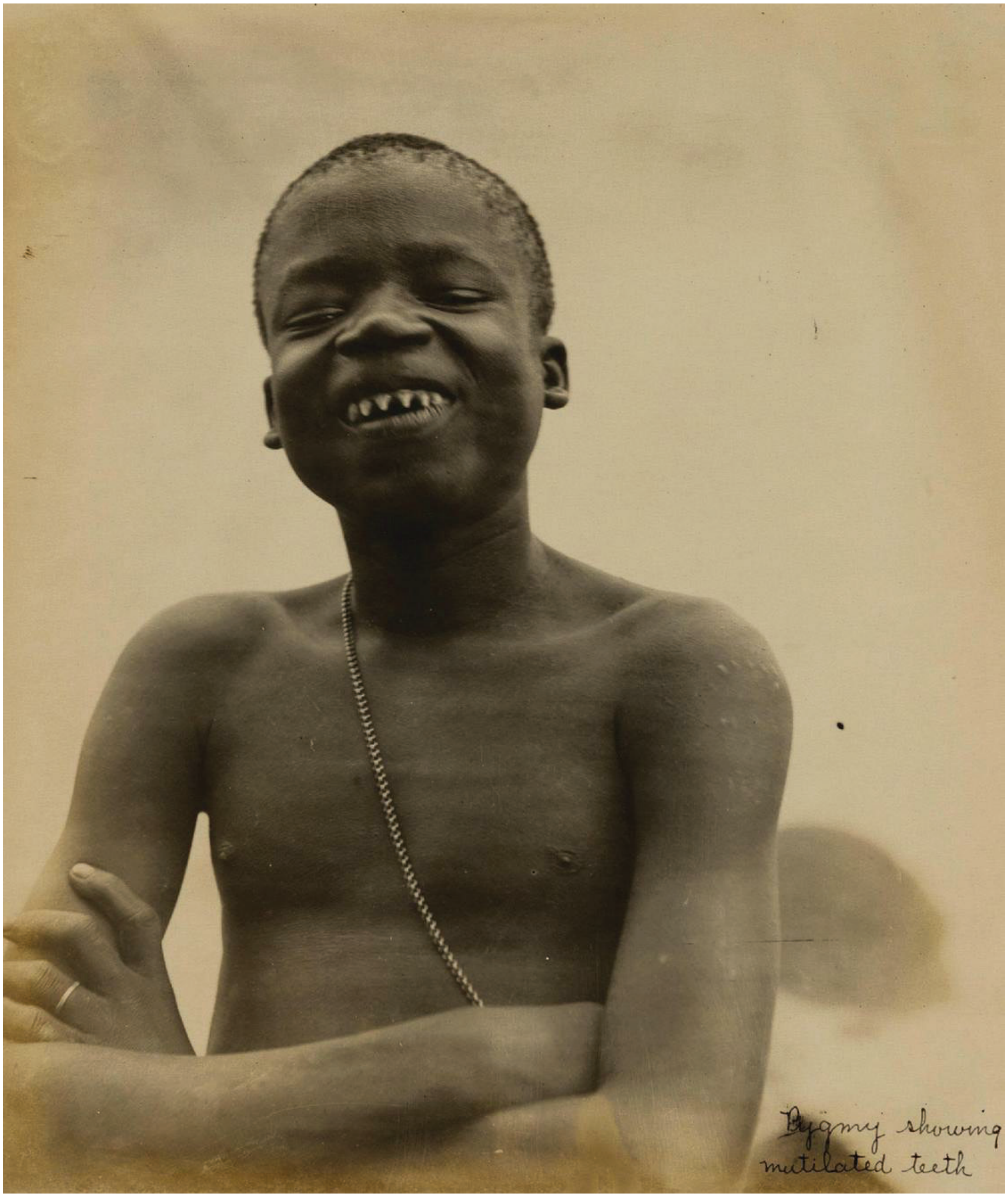

Pygmy showing
mutilated teeth

Figure 9.1 Ota Benga, a pygmy, was brought to the United States for the Africa exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. He was briefly exhibited at the monkey house in the Bronx Zoo in New York. The exhibit implied that people such as Ota Benga were more like

chimpanzees than white Americans. Such exhibits reinforced the incorrect idea that races were real and that Africans were biologically inferior to Europeans.

History and Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

It may come as a surprise to learn that despite hundreds of years of labor by enormously creative and intelligent researchers, no agreed-upon, consistent system of racial classification has ever been developed. Modern genetics has demonstrated that there are no absolute racial markers. In other words, there are no cases in which all members of a race share a gene that does not occur in members of other races (Gannon, 2016).

Anthropology shows us that, from a biological perspective, people are overwhelmingly similar. Compared with other closely related species, humanity shows extremely low levels of biological diversity. Genetically, we are all 99.9% the same (Witherspoon et al., 2007). Although genetic markers can sometimes indicate a person’s likely ancestry, that’s different from race. For example, if we were to randomly choose two people from Africa and one from Northern Europe, genetic testing could identify their likely ancestry, but it will also almost always show that the two from Africa are more genetically different from each other than either is from Northern Europe (Conley, 2017; Goodman, 2020).

Despite the compelling biological similarity of all human groups, one of the important outcomes of human evolution is the wide variation in human form. Some people are short, others are tall; skin color covers a spectrum from very dark to very light; some people have slight builds, others are husky. The degree to which humans vary is even more startling when less obvious differences such as blood type and other biochemical traits are taken into account. However, no group of humans has ever been isolated for long enough to make it very different from other groups, and as a result, our similarities are far more compelling than our differences. The Statement on Race by the American Association of Biological Anthropologists (AABA) says, “Race does not provide an accurate representation of human biological variation. It was never accurate in the past and it remains inaccurate when referencing contemporary human populations.” There is no scientifically coherent way of dividing humanity into races, and race, as a biological characteristic of humans, does not exist (AAA, 1998; Templeton, 2013). Anthropologists understand systems of racial classification as reflecting history, colonialism, oppression, and hierarchy. As the AABA notes, “Race has become a social reality that structures society and how we experience the world. In this regard, race is real, as is racism, and both have real biological consequences” (AABA, 2022). Biologically, humans are truly all members of a single race. Culture and history, not biology, create the differences between us.

The notion that races are not biological categories might seem unusual and counterintuitive. Our experiences seem to tell us that people around us fit into categories that can be described by traits such as skin color or hair color and texture. One of the reasons for this is that we do not see a representative sampling of the world’s population. In the United States, for example, we see new immigrants, native people, and, mostly, the descendants of people who came to our country generations ago. They came, voluntarily or in chains, from specific places under specific historical conditions. Most U.S. families have roots in West Africa, Europe, Mexico, Central America, and East Asia. Very few Americans are the descendants of Australian Aborigines or people from Bhutan, Tajikistan, or Papua New Guinea. The population of Indonesia is more than 273 million, but there are only about 130,000 Indonesians in the United States. On the other hand, there are more than 46 million Americans who have German origins and more than 38 million whose ancestors were from Africa. Many people live in ethnic communities, but if everyone was randomly spread around the United States, you would be about 350 times more likely to run into someone with German ancestry than someone with Indonesian ancestry. In other words, we seem to see race because we see a very partial sample of the world’s population. If we saw people from all parts of the world in equal numbers, if we were as likely to run into someone whose ancestry is from Central Asia or

North Africa as we are to see someone whose ancestry is from Poland or West Africa, we would have a better understanding of the range of human variation, but the illusion of race based on physical appearance would vanish (Infoplease, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021).

Imagining a world in which we are equally likely to meet people from any place in the world helps us to understand the problems with the idea of biological race. There are many, but three are especially important: the arbitrary selection of traits used to define races, the inability to adequately describe within-species variation using racial categories, and the repeated independent evolution of so-called racial characteristics in populations with no historic relationship.

Each human being is a collection of thousands of characteristics such as skin color, blood type, tolerance to lactose (milk sugar), tooth shape, and so on. Variations in these traits result from both genetic and environmental factors, as well as from interactions between the two. There is no way to weight the importance of any trait—no reason, for example, why blood type should be intrinsically more or less important than lactose tolerance, skin color, or hair shape. However, schemes of racial classification select a very small number of traits and ignore others. Such systems typically assume that the traits they have selected have a very strong genetic basis and that these traits are more important than others. Racial systems also assume that the visible traits they select correlate with behavioral and psychological traits. The problem with such schemes is that the races they identify are simply the result of the traits chosen and there is no scientific reason to believe that these traits are biological correlates of either behavior or capabilities. In other words, if people chose different traits, different races would result. Jared Diamond (1994) notes that identifying a race based on lactose tolerance is as valid as basing a racial group on any other trait. However, if we did so, we would group Norwegians, Arabs, North Indians, and some Africans into one race while excluding other peoples. There is no reason to believe that lactose tolerance, a characteristic that we do not use to identify race, correlates with features of personality such as entrepreneurial drive, intelligence, or sexuality. However, there is no reason to believe that eye shape or hair texture correlates with these either.

It is no accident that the characteristics the members of many cultural groups, including Americans, choose as racial markers are traits such as skin color, eye shape, nose shape, and hair texture. These traits are not chosen for their biological importance but because they are easily visible. Thus, they make it relatively easy to assign individuals to races. Using blood types, lactose intolerance, or dry versus wet earwax to determine race would be as logical as other means of defining racial groups, but because such traits are not easily seen, they would be socially useless.

Variation within socially constructed races also presents enormous problems. Obvious and obscure physical differences between members of the same so-called race are enormous, typically exceeding differences between average members of racial groups. In fact, studies using biological measures make it clear that individual differences between people are often greater than racial differences between groups. In other words, measured genetically, you are more different from many people of your race than you are from many people of a different race (Chou, 2017).

To illustrate the importance of variation within races, imagine lining up all the students on your campus according to the color of their skin. Assuming the student population is large enough, all skin tones, from the very light people at one end of the line to the very dark people at the other, would be represented. Most people would fall in between the extremes. At what point would white become black? Are people who stand close to each other in the line necessarily more closely related than those who stand farther apart? There is no way to tell who is related to whom by looking at the line.

Finally, the traits that are typically used to define races have arisen repeatedly and independently throughout the world and are the result of common forms of evolution. Most theories of race assume that people who share similar racial characteristics share similar origins. The fact that traits arise recurrently, however, means that this assumption is faulty.

It is often imagined, for example, that all Black people are descendants of a group of central Africans and all white people are descendants of a group who lived in the Caucasus Mountains. However, this is biological nonsense. To illustrate this point, consider people from the Central African Republic, Papua New Guinea, and France. People from the Central African Republic and Papua New Guinea (off the coast of Australia in Melanesia) are likely to have dark skin, have similar hair texture, and share other features. Most people from France are likely to have light skin and hair texture and other features that look quite different from Africans and Papua New Guineans. From this, one might conclude that Central Africans and Papua New Guineans are more closely related to one another than either is to the French. This is incorrect. Molecular genetic data tell us that Africans and Melanesians show a great deal of genetic divergence (Figure 9.2). Europeans are more closely related to both Africans and Papua New Guineans than either is to the other (Templeton, 1998, p. 640).

Figure 9.2 People who appear similar might have very different ancestries. The girl in the photo might look African but is from Vanuatu in the South Pacific Ocean, over 8,000 miles from the closest point on the African continent.

ERIC LAFFORGUE/Alamy Stock Photo

The claim that perceived differences between social groups are biological and caused by racial inheritance has no validity and must be dismissed. People who wish to argue that racial groups have differing biologically based abilities must first show that such groups are biologically distinct. This has not been done and is impossible to do. One of the most compelling facts about humanity is how closely related every human is to every other human. Mathematical models of migration and genealogy show that the most recent common ancestor of all humans lived between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago (Rohde et al., 2004). Even more remarkable, the model shows that everyone alive more than 5,500 years ago was either an ancestor of all currently living humans or of no one alive today. Rohde and his colleagues (2004) write, “No matter the languages we speak or the colour of our skin, we share ancestors with those who planted rice on the banks of the Yangtze, who first domesticated horses on the steppes of the Ukraine, who hunted giant sloths in the forests of North and South America, and who laboured to build the Great Pyramid of Khufu” (p. 565). And we share them surprisingly recently.

Although race does not occur because of biological differences between people, it is a social reality, and social realities can create biological differences. Differential treatment and discrimination have important effects on the lives and health of those who suffer them. As the reading activity about race and pollution shows, African Americans tend to live in more polluted environments than other Americans. They also tend to live in poorer areas where high-quality food is difficult to find. Kelly Bower and her colleagues (2014) compared equally poor white and Black neighborhoods and showed that at equal levels of poverty, people living in white neighborhoods had far more access to supermarkets than those living in Black neighborhoods. Moreover, African Americans tend to suffer higher degrees of stress than other Americans, and this results in worse physical and mental health (Sternthal et al., 2011).

There is increasing evidence that economic hardship, stress, and racial discrimination can affect the way that our bodies express our underlying genetic code. Epigenetics is the study of the ways life experiences can, through chemical processes, alter how genes are expressed and how these changes can be biologically inherited. In an example of epigenetics, Edwin Aroke and his colleagues (2019) have linked the fact that African Americans are more likely to suffer from debilitating pain than non-Hispanic whites to epigenetic changes that result from experiences of economic deprivation and racism. Biology doesn’t cause race, but racism can create biological difference.

From the time of Franz Boas at the turn of the 20th century, anthropology has made essential contributions to demonstrating the fallacies of race science and to showing that there is no such thing as biological race among humans. *Gods of the Upper Air* (2019), a new book by Charles King, details the groundbreaking work of Boas and his many students. Boas spoke against racism repeatedly, and when he died in 1942, his last words were, “One must never tire of repeating that racism is a monstrous error or an impudent lie” (quoted in Lewis, 2001, p. 456).

RACE, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

While traveling in Malaysia, Nanda asked a friend to explain this exceptionally diverse society. The friend began by saying, “The Indians are the Black people,” referring to the dark skin color of Indians in Malaysia, who are mainly from South India. Joking with him, Nanda asked, “If the Indians are the Black people, who are the white people?” “Oh,” he replied, without missing a beat, “The Portuguese used to be the white people, but now the Chinese are the white people.”

To make sense of the conversation between Nanda and her friend, we need to understand Malaysia’s history. Malaysia has three primary ethnic groups—Malay, Chinese, and Indian—as well as a small group descended from the Portuguese who came to the region in the 16th century and controlled much of the economy for many years. Malaysia was colonized by the Dutch and then the British, but people of Portuguese descent retained much economic control. However, in the 20th century, some economic power moved from the Portuguese to the Chinese community. Because they have taken over the economic position that the Portuguese formerly occupied, Nanda’s friend saw the Chinese as taking over their racial category as well.

The conversation in Malaysia shows the linkage between race, colonialism, and oppression. It illustrates the fact that race is about the political and economic power of different groups in historical context. It is deeply disturbing because it also shows how easily racism can move between cultures. Ethnic Chinese currently make up about a fifth of Malaysia’s population. They control more than 20% of Malaysia’s economy, but most are not wealthy. However, they have frequently been the targets of attacks. Anti-Chinese race rioting in the 1960s killed at least 600 (*Time*, 1969). There were anti-Chinese demonstrations in Malaysia in 2015, and politicians have exploited tensions between ethnic Chinese and Malaysians in recent political campaigns (Griffiths, 2019). Further, Chinese Malaysians have been underrepresented in the Malaysian government, and important Malaysian political parties argue that meaningful power sharing with Chinese Malays usurps the rights of the majority ethnic Malays (Weiss, 2020).

Current-day Americans think about race in terms of visible physical differences. However, other differences such as class, ethnicity, and caste are often conceptualized in racial terms. For example, the 19th-century English theologian and author Charles Kingsley described the Irish in racial terms. In a letter written in 1860 while on a trip to Ireland, Kingsley wrote, “I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country.” He continues, saying that he believes that the condition of the people is not the fault of the English. Then he writes, “But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours” (Kingsley & Kingsley, 1894, p. 308).

Martin (2014) notes that Kingsley was not alone in his understanding of the Irish. Numerous British intellectuals of Kingsley’s era wrote similarly. As in the Malaysian case above, Kingsley’s characterization of the Irish as subhuman was directly linked to issues of political and economic power. Modern historians agree that there was a very strong connection between British colonial dominion over Ireland and the condition of the Irish peasants that Kingsley saw. Further, the belief that the Irish were racially inferior to the English was a key justification for British control of Ireland.

When many Irish migrated to the United States in the 19th century, the idea of Irish racial inferiority became common there (Shanklin, 1994, pp. 3–7). The explicitly racist and anti-Irish and anti-German immigrant “Know Nothing” party won numerous elections in the United States in the 1850s. Noel Ignatiev (2009) has argued that, in the 19th century, a key way the Irish in the United States lost their separate racial identity and began to be seen as white was through their racism toward and ruthless treatment of African Americans.

Similarly, in Japan, the Burakumin are treated as a racial group (Figure 9.3). The Burakumin are Japan’s largest ethnic minority. Historically, Burakumin lived in separate communities and were employed in crafts such as butchering and leatherworking that made them unclean in the eyes of other Japanese. Many Japanese perceive Burakumin as innately, physically, and morally distinct from other Japanese (Yamashiro, 2013). There are no physically visible differences between the Burakumin and other Japanese. However, the stigma against the Burakumin lives on. In 2014, more than a quarter of respondents to a survey of Tokyo residents said they would oppose their children marrying someone of Burakumin ancestry

(Martin, 2019; Onishi, 2009). As with the previous examples, we see race connected with power and oppression.

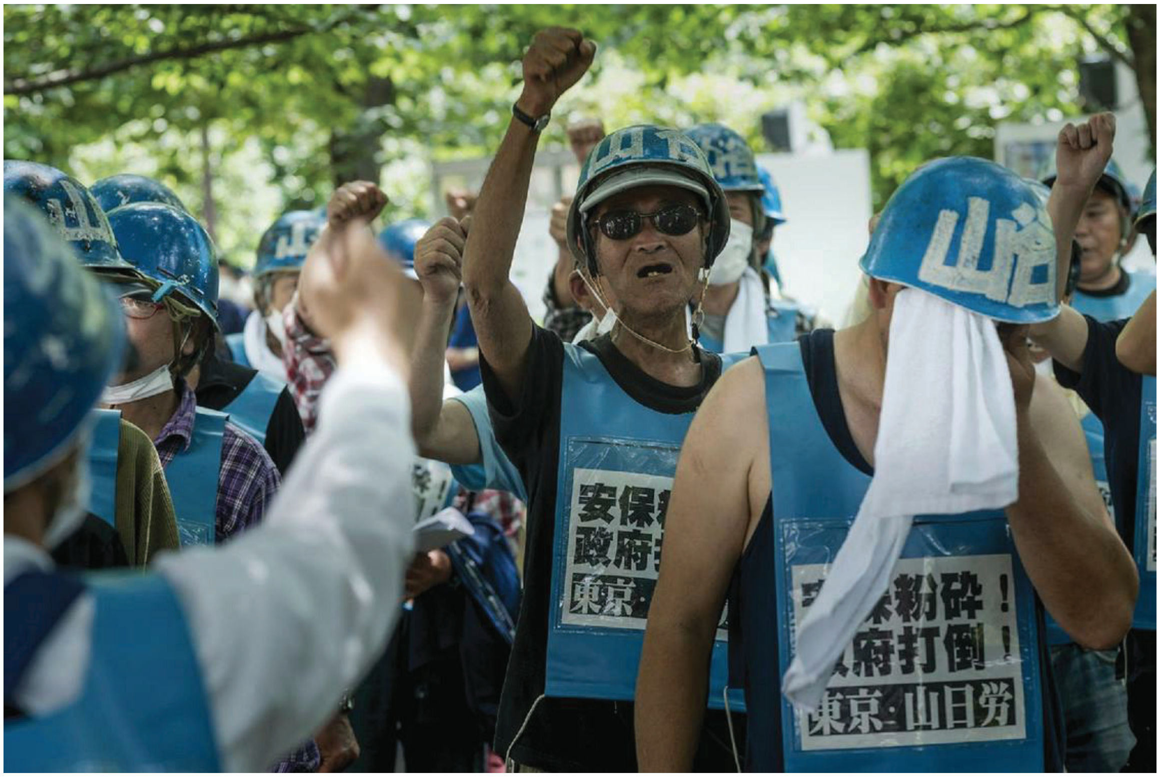

山谷
粉砕！
府打倒！
東京・山日労

Figure 9.3 Burakumin protesters demand equality in Japan. Many Japanese perceive the Burakumin as innately, physically, and morally distinct from other Japanese despite the objective absence of these differences.

Alessandro Di Ciommo/NurPhoto via Getty Images

These examples emphasize that race is a cultural construction, a system of hierarchy related to history and power rather than a scientific system of biological classification. The confusion occurs because race is a metaphor for biology. When people classify by race, they understand personal characteristics such as character, morality, and intelligence to be linked with group characteristics such as ethnicity, caste, or class. They then imagine that all these traits have their foundation in biological traits that may be visible (such as skin color) or invisible (such as heredity or essence). There is no scientific validity to such thinking. However, it is very powerful. It makes differences among groups appear to be the inevitable result of natural law. In so doing, racism hides the effects of power, culture, and history. It provides an objectively false justification for inequality, oppression, and even genocide.

Ethnography: Race, Health, and the Environment in the United States

In the United States, race is a crucial factor affecting people’s life chances. It is true that individuals of all races find success in the United States, but not at the same rate. Black people, taken as a group, earn less money, have higher levels of chronic disease, and live shorter lives than white or Hispanic people (Families USA, 2019). These facts are the result of deep, historical patterns of racism.

One reason that African Americans have worse health than others is that they often live in more polluted areas. The Environmental Protection Agency identifies areas that are so polluted that they pose high risks to human health as “superfund sites.” Across the United States, the closer you are to a superfund site, the more likely you are to find African American families (Kramar et al., 2018, p. 36). In South Carolina, for example, almost 56% of African Americans live near superfund sites, and as the percentage of Black residents in a neighborhood increases, the distance between the neighborhood and the nearest Superfund site decreases. This isn’t because Black families choose to live near such sites. Other research shows that neighborhoods that have high and growing populations of people of color “appear to ‘attract’” new polluting industries (Mohai & Saha, 2015, p. 16). In this case, appearances are deceptive. Communities of color don’t attract pollution. Rather, wealthy communities use political influence to repel polluting industries and waste sites, pushing them toward poor African American communities.

In 2019, a study of the relationship between air pollution exposure and race in the United States, environmental engineer Christopher Tessum and his colleagues demonstrated that race matters. They showed that people who identify as non-Hispanic whites experience about 17% less air pollution than is caused by the goods and services they consume, whereas people who identify as Black or Hispanic experience 56% and 63% *more* air pollution, respectively, than their consumption of goods and services causes (Tessum et al., 2019). Overall, those who identify as white both consume more and live in places affected less by air pollution than those who identify as Black or Hispanic.

Tessum’s study is one of many that demonstrate the links between race, environment, and health in the United States. Anthropologist Melissa Checker (2005) explored the history, long-term effects, and politics of pollution in Hyde Park, an almost entirely African American suburb of Augusta, Georgia.

After World War II, the economy around Augusta began to boom. Lured by low land and labor costs, industrial plants moved to the area. Wealthy, predominantly white areas of the city refused to allow polluting factories to be built nearby. But Black areas had no such protection, and within a few years, 35 factories were built near middle- and low-income largely Black districts, miles away from wealthy predominantly white districts such as Montclair and Lakemont.

In the beginning, the factories seemed a boon. Many Black families had lived in grueling poverty, working as sharecroppers in rural Georgia. Factory wages were low but far better than what might be earned doing farm labor. Additionally, neighborhoods near the factories offered the promise of homeownership. Lured by these prospects and desperate to flee the oppressive conditions of sharecropping, African Americans moved to Hyde Park, a subdivision of small homes built on marshy ground in the shadow of the factories but offering far better conditions than those they had left.

From the 1950s to the early 1970s, things went well. Factory employment was easy to get. For example, the industrial ceramics plant near Hyde Park at its peak employed 1,500 people. And, if emissions from the plant covered Hyde Park and other areas in fine white dust, well, that was just the sign of a thriving industrial economy. Numerous other jobs were available, and the area prospered (Checker, 2005, p. 63).

However, the very high price for this prosperity was becoming evident (Figure 9.4). The local power station leaked polychlorinated biphenyls, now banned chemicals proven to cause numerous health problems, such as cancer and neurological problems. Other chemicals flowed from a scrap-metal yard, and groundwater was polluted by the discharge from a wood-preserving factory. By the 1980s, the residents of Hyde began noticing health problems. Children fainted at school and suffered from rashes, lupus, respiratory problems, and unusual forms of cancer. Vegetable gardening had been a key part of life in Hyde Park, but by the 1990s, gardens became difficult to grow and everything rotted (Checker, 2005, p. 6).

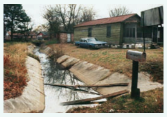


Figure 9.4 Contaminated drainage ditch and houses in Hyde Park, Georgia, in 1998.

Photo by Dr. Robert Bullard

In the 1990s, new processes and cheaper conditions elsewhere led to factory shutdowns. Having destroyed the environment, the factories began to leave. By 1999, Hyde Park had an unemployment rate of more than 2.5 times the national average and a poverty rate 3 times the national average.

Once their land had been poisoned, residents couldn't sell their property. They were caught in a deadly bind: Too poor to move, they were tied to an environment dangerous to their health, and their poverty made health care difficult to get. Coming to Hyde Park to escape sharecropping and find a better life, residents found themselves again trapped in poverty.

The community organized to seek compensation for its members’ poisoned land and disease-blighted lives. However, there were many obstacles, including lawsuits filed by white community organizations and the disappearance of the companies that had polluted the land. For years, they struggled but never fully achieved justice for their claims.

0
100 mi
0
100 km
Georgia
Tennessee
South Carolina
Atlanta
Hyde Park, Augusta
Alabama
Georgia
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Florida
Gulf of Mexico

Today, Hyde Park is gone, the land too toxic for safe occupation. However, the few remaining buildings are often occupied by the homeless. The city has had plans to turn the area into a retention pond, but that project has been delayed for a decade. When, in 2021, an Augusta news station reached out to the city’s director of engineering for information on when construction might start, there was no response (Jones, 2021).

Hyde Park may be gone, but Augusta is thriving. It is home to universities, medical centers, and the Masters Tournament of golf. However, the racial divide remains deep. White people account for 35% of the population but 22% of those in poverty. And although 55% of the population is African American, 70% of those in poverty are Black (Welfareinfo.org, n.d.).

RACE AND CASTE IN THE UNITED STATES

Although numerous groups have had long histories in the United States, the cultural understanding of race in our society has been most deeply affected by distinctions between Black and white Americans. The binary form of racial classification grew out of the historical conditions of slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, and legal segregation. For these systems to work, people had to be assigned to unambiguous groups. There was no provision in law for people who were neither clearly Black nor white. Social order in the United States thus historically rested on clearly distinguished races. Although the legal status of these races varied from state to state, their members usually lived in separate places, were subject to separate laws or differential law enforcement, and were understood as fundamentally different kinds of people (Figure 9.5). In other words, as John Dollard (1937) pointed out almost a century ago, race in the United States was historically a form of caste.

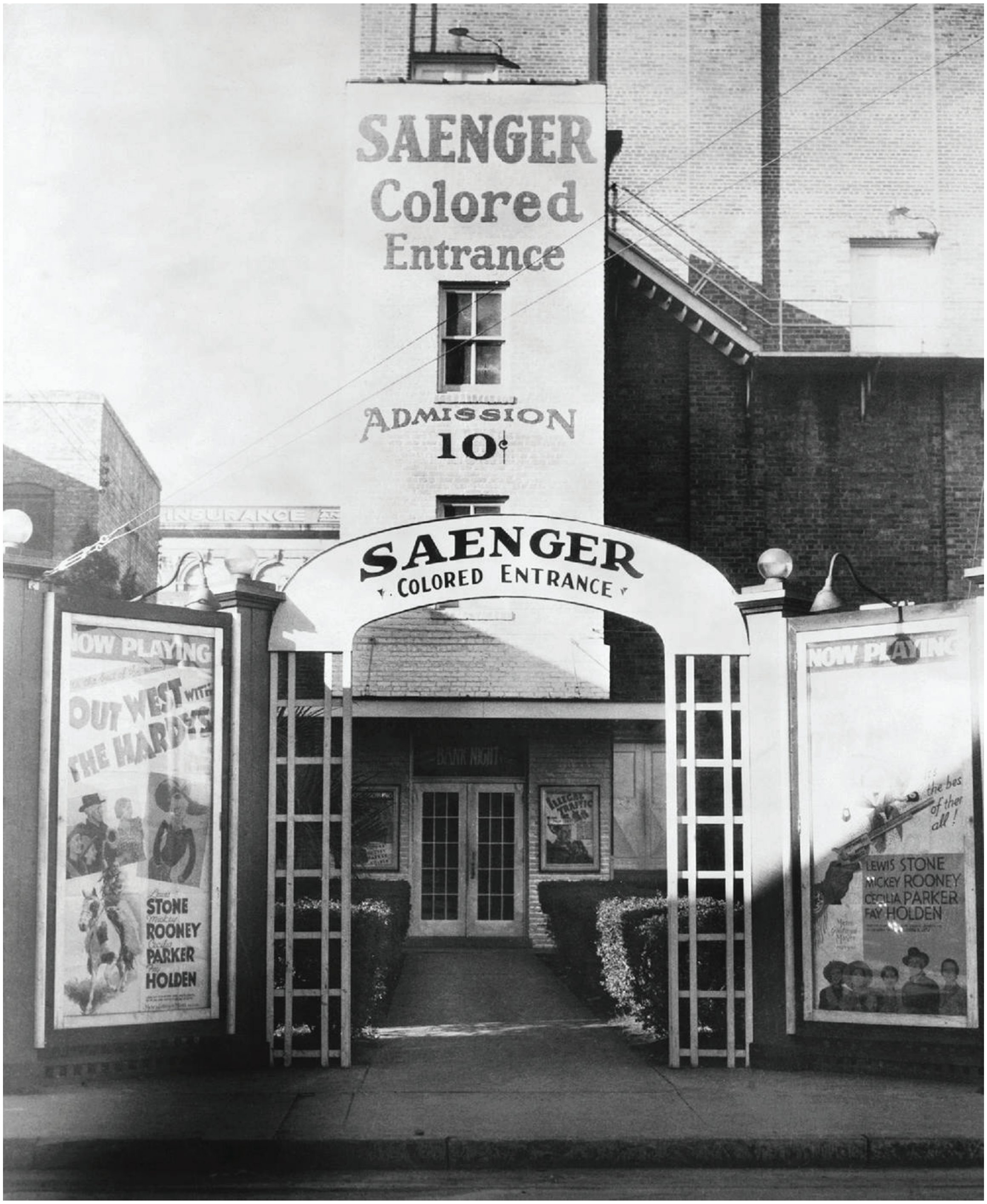

SAENGER
Colored
Entrance
ADMISSION
10¢
SAENGER
COLORED ENTRANCE
NOW PLAYING
OUT WEST WITH THE HARDYS
STONE
ROONEY
PARKER
HOLDEN
NOW PLAYING
LEWIS STONE
MICKEY ROONEY
CECILIA PARKER
FAY HOLDEN

Figure 9.5 In the past in the United States, laws in many places separated races and guaranteed white social and economic superiority. This picture shows the “colored entrance” of the Saenger Theater in Pensacola, Florida, in the 1930s—a good example of legally enforced race

separation. Note that the entrance leads to the balcony.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Racial laws in the United States focused on ideas about white purity and ensured white social and economic superiority. Although the exact percentage of African ancestry required to be considered Black varied from place to place and time to time, the overarching idea was the “one-drop rule”—the notion that any African ancestry at all made one Black (Dominguez, 1986; Loewen, 1988). In an ironic comment on the construction of race in the United States, Haitian dictator Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier (1907–1971) once told a U.S. reporter that 96% of Haitians were white. Surprised and puzzled, the reporter asked on what grounds he arrived at this percentage. Duvalier explained that Haiti used the same procedure for counting whites that Americans used for counting Blacks: a drop of white blood (Hirschfeld, 1996).

Ideas about race purity and hierarchy based on the relationships between Blacks and whites tended to expand to include other groups, particularly Hispanics in the Southwest and Asians in California and the railroad and mining camps of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In each case, people were divided into mutually exclusive groups based on their birth. These groups were understood as hierarchically ranked, and members were thought to possess specific characteristics. In other words, the caste system of Black–white relations was replicated with other groups. Today, Americans increasingly identify as multiracial. In the 2010 census, about 9 million people identified as multiracial. In the 2020 census, 33.8 million did, a 276% increase (Jones, 2021; Jones et al., 2021). In 2015, one in seven (14%) infants born in the United States had parents who identified as members of different races, one Hispanic and one non-Hispanic parent, or at least one parent who identified as multiracial (Livingston, 2017).

In the United States, we think of race mainly in terms of minority races such as African, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, or Native American. But white is also a racial identity. Because being white is a cultural norm in the United States, however, the privileges and advantages that go with it are unconsciously assumed and largely invisible (Allen, 1997). For most white people, ordinary experiences such as shopping, buying or renting a place to live, finding a hairdresser, or using a credit card do not generally involve a reflection on their racial identity. But for Hispanic/Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and particularly African Americans, these everyday activities cannot be taken for granted (McIntosh, 1989). Because there are clear advantages to being white in the United States and elsewhere, white anxiety about the loss of privilege has had significant political implications. It has played a role in the rise of populism in Europe, in the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and in the continued political force of controversies about how history and race are taught (Lalami, 2016; Pettit, 2021).

Although the historical system of racial identity in the United States was based on notions of caste hierarchy, there is intense debate around the role of race in the United States today. For more than a half-century, legal, economic, and social policies in the United States have been designed to weaken and ultimately destroy the race/caste system. Few doubt that some progress has been made toward this goal. In a 2011 poll, 90% of respondents, both Black and white, said that civil rights for African Americans have improved in their lifetimes. However, people differed starkly about how much progress has been made. The same poll shows that almost 60% of Blacks thought discrimination was a problem in finding a job. Most whites believed that it was not (Page & Mallenbaum, 2011). Most troubling, perceptions of race relations grew steadily worse between 2014 and 2021. According to an Economist/YouGov poll, in 2014, solid majorities of both white and Black people characterized race relations as good. However, in a Gallup poll in summer 2021, 56% of white people and 66% of Black people characterized race relations as either somewhat bad or very bad (Gallup, n.d.; Horowitz et al., 2019). American politics has certainly exacerbated this situation. In June 2020, more than two thirds of Americans, including 63% of whites and 88% of African Americans, said they thought Donald Trump had increased racial tensions. However, it is also true that Mr. Trump's unusually explicit appeals to ethnic and racial resentment draw on longstanding divisions in American society (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018).

Race and Life Chances in the United States

There are strong differences in economic position and in **life chances**, the opportunities that people have to fulfill their potential in society, among self-identified racial groups. The intersection of race and class is indicated by longstanding inequalities in income, wealth, and social mobility.

In 2020, the median household income for African Americans was $45,870; for Hispanic Americans, it was $55,321; and for white, non-Hispanic families, it was $74,912 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Differences in family wealth, which include home equity, retirement accounts, and other valuables, are even starker, with Black median family wealth only 15% that of white families. In 2019, the median household wealth for non-Hispanic whites was $188,200; for Hispanic Americans, it was $36,100; and for African Americans, it was only $24,100 (Bhutta et al., 2020). Statistics on intergenerational class mobility show a similar picture. Black children born into poverty are twice as likely as white children born into poverty to be poor as adults. Black children born to wealth are substantially less likely than their white counterparts to be wealthy as adults (Reeves & Pulliam, 2019). When we examined economic mobility in India in the last chapter, we noted that the nation ranked very low in intergenerational mobility, with only a 3% chance of a child whose parents' income is in the bottom 20% of the nation rising to the top 20%. Overall, intergenerational economic mobility is considerably greater in the United States. However, if we examine Black families, we find that only 4% of children from Black families in the lowest 20% income bracket will rise to the top 20%. Fifty-three percent of children born to parents in the lowest 20% will remain in that income bracket (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012).

Racial disparities are also revealed in access to health care and health care outcomes. For example, infant mortality in 2018 was more than twice as high among Blacks as among whites (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), and life expectancy at birth in 2018 was almost 4 years longer for white males than for Black males (Statistica, 2021). Death rates from cancer, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS, as well as complications from diseases like diabetes, such as loss of a limb or kidney disease, are all substantially higher for African Americans than for whites. The causes of these and many other health disparities are clearly linked to unequal treatment and unequal access to health care. This unequal access is linked significantly to medical insurance. Even with very substantial gains in access to health insurance because of the Obama-era Affordable Care Act, differences persist. A 2019 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that nonelderly Hispanics had an uninsured rate of 20%; nonelderly Blacks, 11.4%; and nonelderly whites, 7.8% (Artiga et al., 2021).

Race can also interact with environmental disasters. For example, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, death came most often for African Americans. Patrick Sharkey (2007, p. 497) noted that African Americans were disproportionately represented as victims and among those still missing. As Neil Smith notes, the government’s response to the hurricane deepened the social grooves of class and race already built into New Orleans’ society (Smith, 2006). A similar pattern occurred when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston in August 2017. Although Houston fared far better than New Orleans, poor communities and communities of color were hit much harder than wealthy white communities (May, 2017).

We have cited statistics about income, wealth, health, and the environment. We could go on to discuss education, housing, incarceration, the use of public space, and many other topics. But the picture they paint of racial stratification will remain the same. These differences are the result of specific policies, laws, and traditions, including “Jim Crow” laws that restricted the activities of African Americans in many states. However, there are many other structures of inequality. Housing and the GI Bill are critical examples. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the government-sponsored Home Owners Loan Corporation produced maps that identified nonwhite areas of American cities as bad credit risks. This practice, called “redlining” since high-risk neighborhoods were colored in red on the maps, made it difficult or impossible for residents to get mortgages, loans, or insurance (Figure 9.6). Redlining enforced segregation even where it was not legally required. It reduced the value of property owned by nonwhite Americans. Since school funding is usually based on property values, it diminished their educational opportunities as well. Homeownership is one of the biggest contributors to intergenerational family wealth transmission. Generations without it have left nonwhite Americans poorer and less able to get credit on good terms than white Americans (Choi et al., 2019, p. 506; Zaloom, 2019, pp. 138–39).

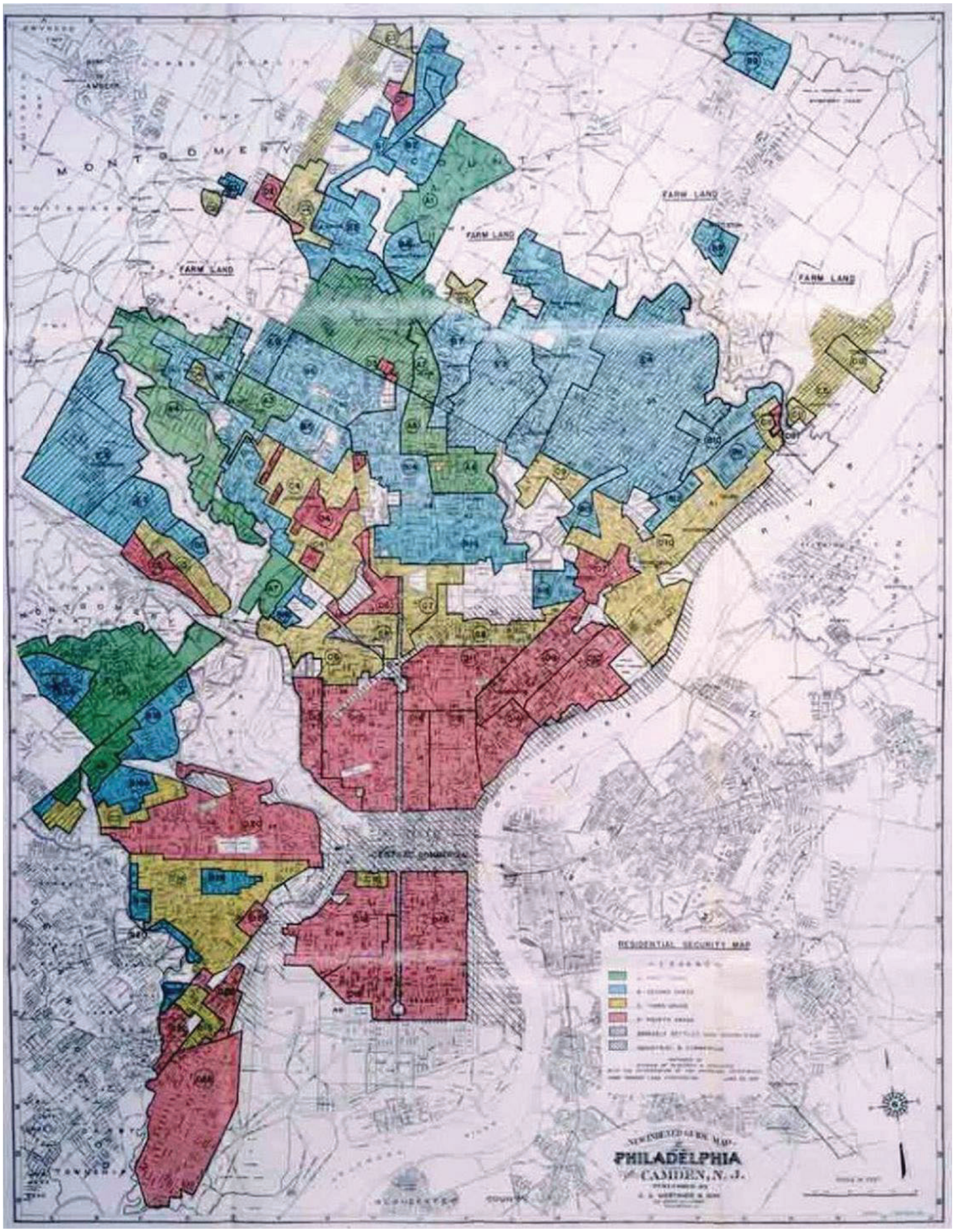

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
FARM LAND
FARM LAND
FARM LAND
FARM LAND
RESIDENTIAL SECURITY MAP
PHILADELPHIA
CAMDEN, N.J.

Figure 9.6 Redlining map of Philadelphia produced by the Home Owners Loan Corporation. Areas colored in green and blue were considered low risk for home loans and had

almost entirely white populations. Areas in red were high risk. People who lived there were mostly Black and could not get loans to purchase their homes.

Volgi archive/Alamy Stock Photo

After World War II, government assistance in the form of the GI Bill raised millions of white Americans into the middle class. Using these benefits, veterans bought homes in newly created suburbs. They attended universities and received job placement services. There were one million African American veterans, and they received benefits too but were generally unable to use them. The new housing developments were segregated, and loans were unavailable to purchase housing in the redlined areas where African Americans were allowed to live. In 1947, in New York and New Jersey, 67,000 mortgages were supported by the GI Bill, but fewer than 100 of them went to nonwhites (Kotz, 2005). The GI Bill funded education, but almost all the money went to predominantly white universities. Even where nonwhites were permitted to attend the same universities as whites, few were admitted. For example, in 1946, the University of Pennsylvania had 9,000 students, of whom 46 were African American. Other policies directed people of color into vocational programs rather than higher education and unskilled rather than skilled labor (Rothstein, 2017; Weber, 2017). These policies are no longer in place, but their historic reach is long.

Long ago, the anthropologist Gerald Berreman (1930–2013) labeled race an “invidious distinction imposed unalterably at birth upon whole categories of people to justify the unequal social distribution of power, livelihood, security, privilege, esteem, freedom—in short, life chances” (1972, p. 410). Berreman went on to argue that racism, like the other invidious distinctions he identified, was encoded in institutions. Racism could not be solved by what he called “brotherly love” (though surely that cannot hurt) but only by “addressing the structure of inherited stratification upon which it rests” (1972, p. 411).

It is critical to understand that both race and racism are historical phenomena. They exist because certain groups of people were brought together, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes forcibly, under specific conditions and at specific times. They came together under conditions where wealth and power were held almost entirely by members of one group. Members of other groups, through their labor as well as artistic and intellectual accomplishment, made American culture possible but were prevented from full participation in it and especially from sharing its benefits. Like all people, Americans live in a culture that was created by its history and cannot simply declare themselves free of that history. Because we are members of this society, we must contend with it, whether our ancestors arrived in the 17th century or we arrived in the 21st.

The structures of inequality are often visible in the landscape. In towns and cities throughout much of the United States, there are monuments to the Civil War. Though some have been taken down in recent years, more than 830 of these were monuments to the Confederacy. Most were erected in the early 20th century when the civil rights of African Americans were under attack (Best, 2020). But imagine, for a moment, if instead of erecting these monuments, communities had put up monuments of slaves breaking free of their chains. What a different country *that* United States would have been.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

The Race Project

“[Racism] is not about how you look; it is about how people assign meaning to how you look.” This idea, from historian Robin D. G. Kelley, underlies *RACE: Are We So Different?* an exhibit developed by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and available at the interactive website www.understandingrace.org.

The project is aimed at educating the public about the reality—and the unreality—of race. Begun in the mid-1990s, the project continues today, directed by biological anthropologist Alan Goodman and cultural anthropologist Yolanda Moses. *RACE* is both a website and a traveling museum exhibition (Figure 9.7). It has been in more than 41 cities and is on permanent exhibition in San Diego, California, and St. Paul, Minnesota (Ifekwunigwe et al., 2017). A book, *How Real is Race* (2014), is associated with the exhibit.

Figure 9.7 The American Anthropological Association's *RACE: Are We So Different?* project is a web presentation and traveling exhibition that challenges American ideas about race.

David L Ryan/The Boston Globe via Getty Images

The three main messages of the exhibit and its associated materials are that race is a recent human invention; that race is about culture, not biology; and that race and racism continue to be embedded in U.S. culture, social institutions, and everyday life. The *RACE* project uses the lens of history, science, and lived experience to explore the changing conceptions of race in the United States, the everyday reality of race, and the contemporary science that is challenging commonly held ideas about race.

As former project director Mary Margaret Overbey (2007) notes, “We like to think that America has moved beyond race.” But, she argues, “Race remains an unspoken, yet powerful and not well understood, facet of life in the United States.” Through videos, oral histories, visuals, and provocative interactive computer exercises, the *RACE* exhibit demonstrates that race is embedded in almost all areas of U.S. life: home and neighborhood, health and medicine, education, and schools. Race and racism are not just inside our heads but are also built into U.S. laws, culture, and social institutions.

The *RACE* project has a historical perspective, underlining the fact that racial and ethnic categories are made by humans and change over time. The exhibit draws on contemporary science to demonstrate that human beings are more genetically alike than they are different and that no one gene or set of genes supports the idea of race. Sorting people by physical differences is a recent invention, not more than a few hundred years old. In the United States, it is closely linked to the growth of the plantation economy, and in other countries, it is also linked to a specific set of political and economic histories.

Research for the *RACE* project seeks to discover how people think and talk about race through interviews with high school students, community groups, museum visitors, and focus groups. The project also involves collaboration with many scientific institutions and scholars from different disciplines. The interactive website includes a virtual tour of the *RACE* exhibit, videos, historical timelines, and quizzes, as well as scholarly papers, a bibliography, and a family guide that helps parents talk to children about race. Anthropology's holistic, four-field approach makes it a natural to tackle this longstanding issue in American life.

In addition to AAA's *RACE* project, anthropologists were also involved in the PBS project *Race—The Power of an Illusion* and its website www.pbs.org/race, as well as in the April 2018 issue of *National Geographic* in which the magazine not only explores race but confronts its own racist legacy as well.

Check out the AAA's Race project website at https://understandingrace.org/. You'll find out interesting things about race and your own understandings, and you will see the important contribution anthropology makes to addressing this central issue in American society.

RACIAL CLASSIFICATION IN BRAZIL

Comparing Brazil and the United States shows that racial stratification occurs in societies with very different cultural understandings of race. As in the southern United States, Brazil had a plantation economy whose core labor force consisted of African slaves. After 1888, when Brazil abolished slavery, the Brazilian government followed a policy of “whitening” by encouraging the immigration of Europeans. However, unlike in the United States, after the era of slavery, racial distinctions were not encoded into law in Brazil. Further, for both historical and cultural reasons, marriage between members of different groups was not prohibited, and mixing among many different ethnicities was common (Goldstein, 1999; Sheriff, 2001). This is reflected in Brazilian racial self-identity. Today, individuals of African descent account for about 53% of Brazil’s population of about 212 million people. This makes Brazil the country with the largest Black population outside of Africa (Barbara, 2015). In Africa, only Nigeria and Ethiopia have larger populations. Yet, in Brazil, only about 15% of these people identify themselves as *preta* (Black) on the census forms. The rest self-identify as *parda* (Brown, of partial African ancestry; Figure 9.8). This self-identification is tied to social stratification: Brazilian understandings of race may be flexible, but the distribution of wealth and education in Brazil is profoundly unequal and correlates strongly with color—whites at the top, Blacks at the bottom, and *parda* somewhere between the two.

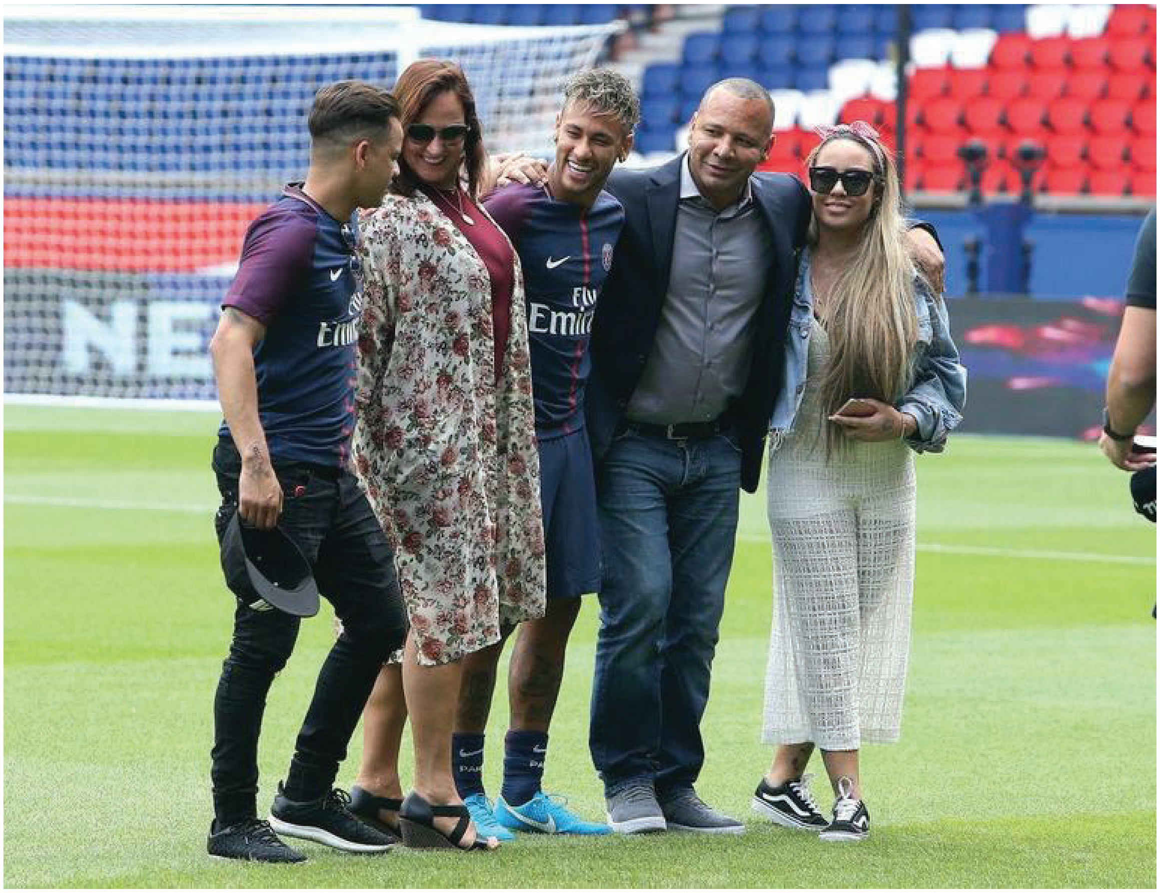


Figure 9.8 About 53% of Brazilians have some African ancestry but only 15% of these identify as Black. The picture shows Neymar Jr. a Brazilian soccer star with his parents, sister, and friend, Jo Amancio. In 2010, Neymar, then 18, was asked if he had ever experienced racism. He replied “Never… It's not like I'm Black you know.”

iStockphoto.com/franckreporter

Brazilian racial classification is extremely complex, particularly among those who self-identify as African descended. A 1976 census collected 143 terms used to describe race and color, although many of these were variants of each other (Nobles, 2000, p. 114; Travae, 2011). In a community studied by anthropologist Conrad Kottak (1992, p. 67), almost everyone had ancestors brought from Africa as slaves, and most would have been considered Black in the United States.

However, almost half identified themselves as either dark or light *mulato*, an intermediate category between Black and white. In contrast to the United States, where full siblings are always considered of the same race, brothers and sisters in this village were often classified as belonging to different races. The village people based their assessment of race on multiple criteria such as skin color, nose length and shape, eye color and shape, hair type and color, and shape of the lips. They used more than 10 different racial categories, but they applied the terms inconsistently and disagreed about which categories individuals should be placed in. These placements were frequently mediated by social and economic class standings. Wealthier and higher-status people tended to be placed in "whiter" categories regardless of their appearance.

Race plays a critical role in inequality in Brazil as it does in the United States. Poverty rates are about twice as high for nonwhites as for whites (Nitahara, 2019). Nonwhites have worse health and a higher incidence of premature death than whites (de Oliveira, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic hit nonwhite Brazilians particularly hard. Excess deaths among Black and Brown Brazilians were more than 11% higher than among white Brazilians (Marinho et. al., 2022). Nonwhite Brazilians also lag in education, even when factors other than racial classification are controlled (Marteleto & Dondero, 2016). In recent years, Black and Brown Brazilians have made significant advances in access to higher education, now accounting for just above 50% of university students. However, about 78% of white Brazilians finish secondary school, but only 55.8% of nonwhite students do so.

Although in the past, Brazil emphasized Euro-Brazilian history, today, like many nations throughout Latin America, Brazil promotes its mixed racial/ethnic heritage as a central aspect of its national identity and ideology. In the 1940s, the influential Brazilian anthropologist and politician Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987) promoted the idea that Brazilian national identity resulted from mixing people of European, African, and indigenous ancestry (Bailey & Telles, 2006; Freyre, 1946). Freyre, a student of Franz Boas at Columbia, adopted many of Boas's understandings of race and racial equality (Sánchez-Eppler, 1992).

His influence gave race mixing in Brazil a positive connotation.

Freyre’s work was used to promote the notion that Brazil was a racial democracy. The 1970 census, for example, did not ask about people’s race; the government argued that there was no need to ask the question because there was no race issue in Brazil (Bailey & Telles, 2006, p. 77). This public denial had some positive effects. The linkage between Brazilian identity and mixed ancestry has probably made it easier for many Brazilians to negotiate their racial identity. It has also led to a society in which, at least in theory, opportunity is open to people of diverse physical characteristics and ancestry. However, the persistent denial that race is a social issue also led to widespread refusal to take discrimination and racial stratification seriously despite many studies that show that racial inequality is prevalent (Reichmann, 1995). Alexandre Emboaba Da Costa (2016) notes that it has led not to transcending race but to reinforcing the racial caste system. On every measure of social and economic well-being, Brazilians who self-identify as having African ancestry are far worse off than those who self-identify as white. As one Brazilian told a reporter, “Black is beautiful, but white—white is just easier” (Nolen, 2015). In the late 2010s, Brazil made significant advances in moving toward racial equality in health and education. But, as in the United States, this provoked a severe backlash, resulting in the election in 2018 of the far-right-wing populist Jai Bolsonaro, who had been convicted only a year earlier of racist offenses against the Black population. Bolsonaro and members of his government have made many openly racist, misogynistic, and homophobic statements, and he has vowed to end programs aimed at helping nonwhite and indigenous populations (Treece, 2021). A comparison of Brazilian and American racial stratification systems not only shows that racial inequality exists in societies with very different cultural constructions of race but reaffirms its enduring link to political power.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity refers to perceived differences—such as culture, religion, language, and national origin—by which groups of people distinguish themselves and are distinguished by others. Like nations, ethnicities are often understood as a natural aspect of society based on some unchanging essence (Becker, 2015). In reality, ethnic identities emerge from interactions and conflicts that differentiate groups of people. Such conflicts are shaped by politics, economics, and history. Ethnicity becomes important and takes a particular shape depending on specific historical, demographic, and economic circumstances (De Vos & Romanucci-Ross, 1995).

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969/1998) argued that ethnic identity is constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other similar groups. Barth further argued that ethnicity must be viewed as an aspect of relationships among groups in a society. Such relationships may be competitive, conflictual, cooperative, or a combination of these. Ethnicity is a vehicle for association, collective action, and personal identity. In other words, ethnicity is a quality that people experience as a group and in opposition to other groups. In hierarchical societies, it is often part of a classification system that helps determine people’s access to wealth and power.

In many places, people defined as members of minority ethnic groups have been systematically denied political and economic rights. For example, about 10 million Roma and Travelers (sometimes referred to as Gypsies, now understood as a derogatory label) live in Europe and are, in many cases, subject to human rights abuses. Even today, no European government has a fully successful record of protecting their rights. In some cases, people’s right to exist at all has been denied. In the 20th century, genocide was practiced against Jews in Europe, Armenians in Turkey, Tutsis in Rwanda, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and many other groups in other places.

Popular media often attribute conflict and violence to ethnicity: Conflicts between groups such as Arabs and Jews, Irish and English, Turks and Kurds, and many others are presented as natural eruptions of age-old ethnic hatreds. Seeing them in this way promotes the idea that they are unsolvable. If, for example, Hindus and Muslims hate each other and commit violence against each other simply because they are Hindus and Muslims, it is unlikely that anything could create peace among them.

However, ethnic conflicts are usually best explained as contemporary struggles for political and economic power. South Sudan, for example, gained its independence in 2011 but by 2013 had descended into a civil war that by 2018 had cost almost 400,000 lives and displaced over 4 million (Blanchard, 2019; Congressional Research Service, 2022) as members of different ethnic groups fought for access to resources such as oil and political power. People relied on their ethnic communities in this battle, not because of age-old hatreds for other communities but rather because, in a society with a very weak government, only these communities can provide social safety nets (Martell, 2018).

Ethnicity and the Nation-State

Ethnicity and nation-states are both social constructions. Ethnicity is a dynamic aspect of politics in many nation-states, and there is often tension between ethnic identity and national identity. Ambitious politicians often use ethnicity and ethnic conflict to gain and manipulate power. They mobilize rhetoric of historical abuses and inequities, arousing fears of victimization among members of different groups. However, although ethnic conflicts may have old precedents, they are generally rooted in contemporary and recent circumstances. Such conflicts are shaped by political events and disputes over economic resources. For example, much of the violence in Iraq in the 2000s was portrayed as part of an endless and endlessly violent struggle between Shi’a and Sunni—two groups of Muslims with different traditions and somewhat different beliefs. On the one hand, Shi’a and Sunni indeed differentiated themselves early in the history of Islam, and there have often been conflicts between Shi’a and Sunni communities. However, it is also true that most of the nearly 14 centuries since the prophet’s death have been characterized by peace and cohabitation far more than by warfare. To understand the current conflict between Shi’a and Sunni, one must consider the impact of

British colonialism, the creation of the Iraqi state, the emergence of the Ba’athist political movement, the oil boom, the Iran–Iraq war, the U.S. invasion of 2003, and the rise and fall of the Islamic State in the middle to late 2010s. Some of these have little to do with religion. All are historic and economic events in which groups that are differentiated in part by religion have fought for power and control (Saleh, 2009; Yaphe, 2014).

Ethnic conflict in the former state of Yugoslavia in the 1990s illustrates the role of history and politics well. Before World War I, this area of Eastern Europe and the Balkans was part of the Ottoman Empire or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There were many different ethnic groups, including Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Bosnians, Macedonians, Slovenes, and smaller minorities such as Roma and Ashkali. Many of these had religious differences: There were Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and, before World War II, a substantial Jewish population. There was often tension between these communities, but there were many ties among them, and although there was occasional violence, relations between them were generally peaceful.

At the end of World War I, the first of a series of multiethnic states were created in Southeast Europe. First known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, in 1929, it became Yugoslavia. After World War II, Yugoslavia was controlled by a powerful, Serb-dominated, central government supported by the Soviet Union. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, the nation disintegrated into ethnic violence. Throughout the 1990s, bitter conflicts among different ethnic and religious groups—Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Macedonians, and Albanians—led to deaths that numbered in the hundreds of thousands (Figure 9.9). By the early 2000s, six new nations, divided largely along ethnic lines, had emerged from the former Yugoslavia (Figure 9.10).

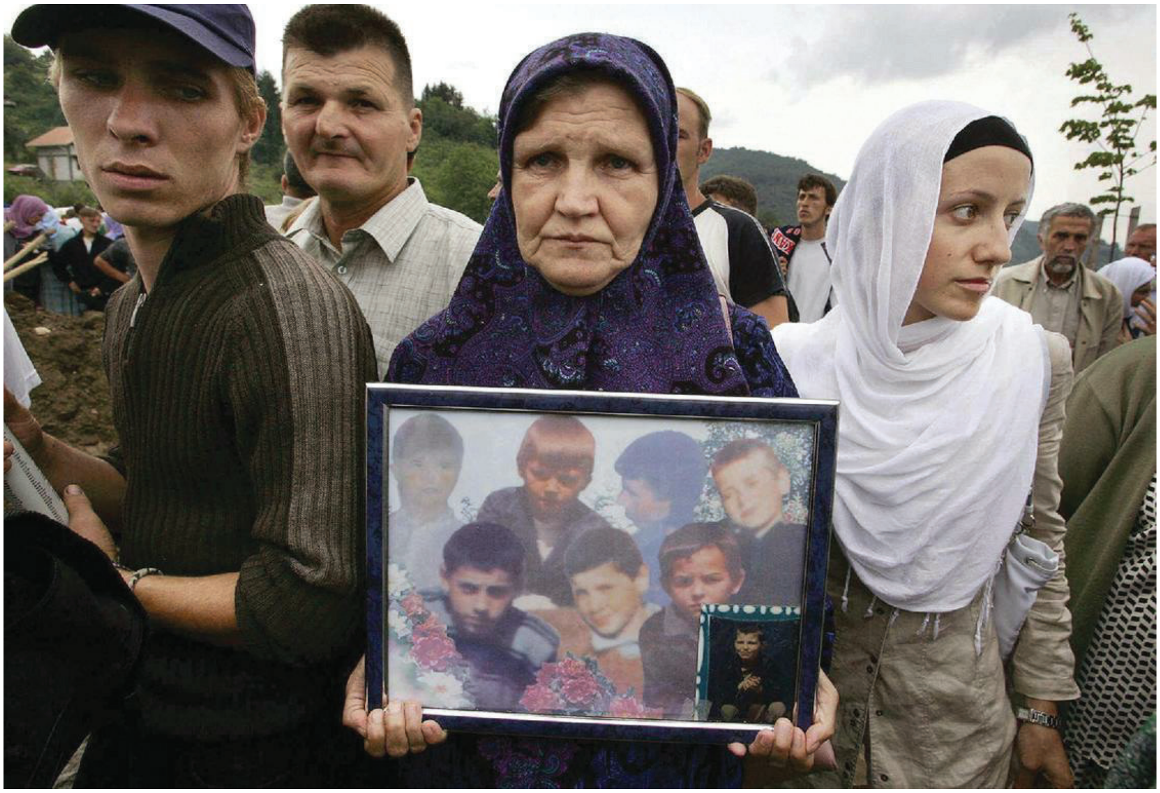
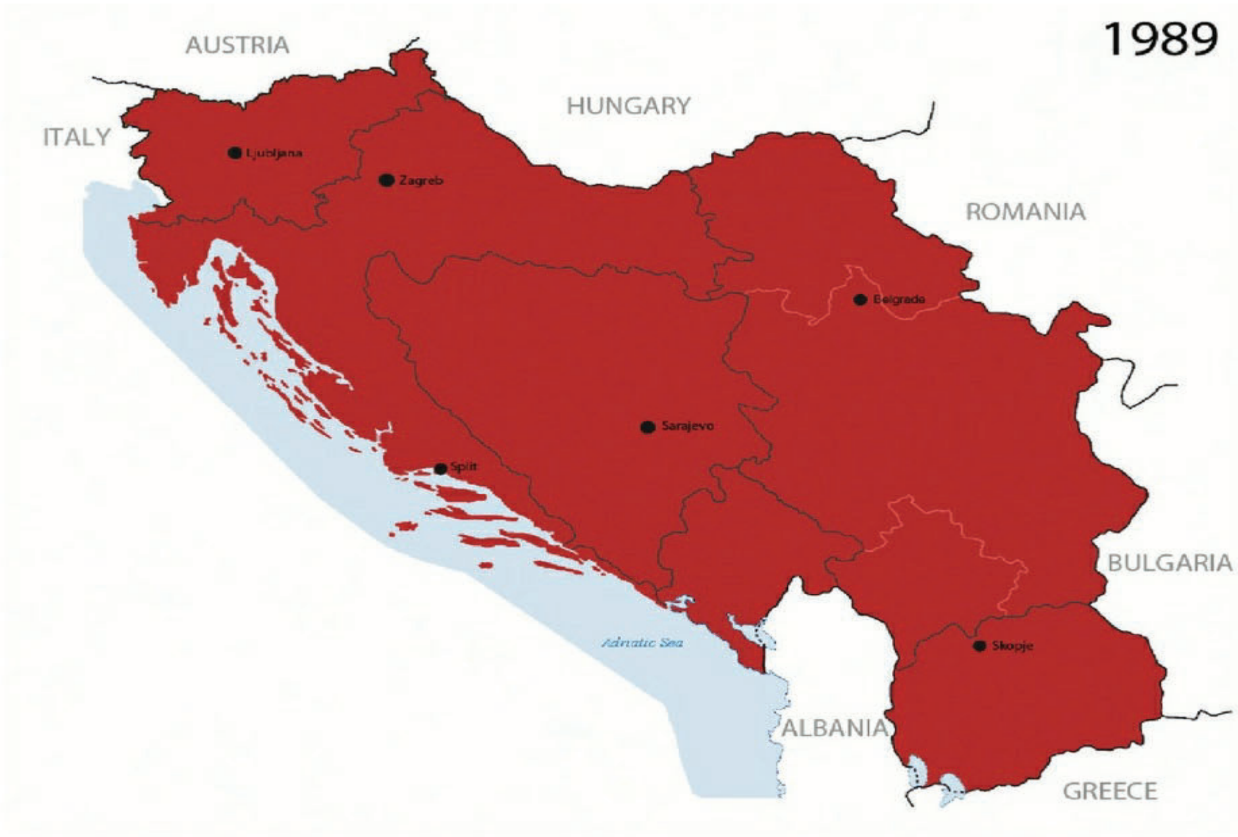
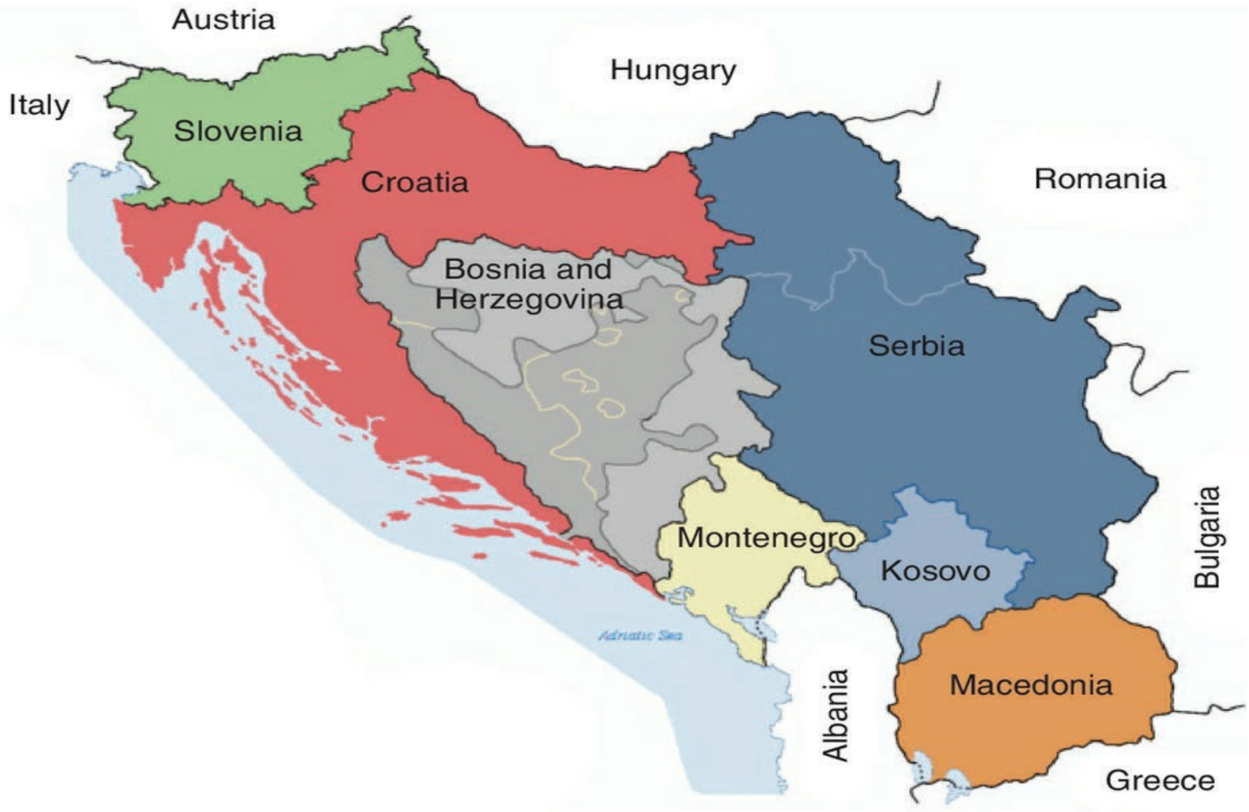


Figure 9.9 A Bosnian woman from Srebrenica holds a picture of children murdered in the civil wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

DIMITAR DILKOFF/AFP via Getty Images


1989
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
ITALY
ROMANIA
BULGARIA
ALBANIA
GREECE
Ljubljana
Zagreb
Belgrade
Sarajevo
Split
Skopje
Adriatic Sea


Austria
Hungary
Italy
Romania
Slovenia
Croatia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Serbia
Montenegro
Kosovo
Macedonia
Bulgaria
Albania
Greece
Adriatic Sea

Description

Figure 9.10 Yugoslavia in 1989 and the nations that resulted from its breakup.

The conflicts that led to the formation of new nations were portrayed as rooted in ethnic differences. However, historically, these differences had been contained in Yugoslavia, as well as in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires for generations. The real causes of these conflicts were primarily political and economic. Ethnic divisions were used in the service of political ends. In other words, old ethnic hatreds did not cause the wars but were used in the service of politics (Gilliland, 1995; Judt, 2005, pp. 665–684; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Ramet, 1996). Leaders mobilized certain aspects of history and cultural differences in the struggle for economic and political power in the collapsing Yugoslav state. This can be seen with clarity in the creation of Croatia.

In 1981, after the death of Josip Broz Tito, who had ruled Yugoslavia since the end of World War II, the new political leadership introduced an economic austerity program in an attempt to shore up the nation’s import/export imbalance. The resulting shortages of consumer goods undermined faith in the government, and people depended even more than usual on kinship and friendship networks within their ethnic groups to survive. Hostility was mainly directed toward the national government, which exploited longstanding cultural differences among the main ethnic groups to secure its own political power. A Croat nationalist leader, Franjo Tudjman (1922–1999), gained supporters by urging Croats to claim their national rights against Serbs, Muslims, and others. These moves reignited the bitter divisions between Croats and Serbs that had emerged in World War II when the Ustaše, the Croat fascist party, pursued genocidal policies against Serbs, Jews, Roma, and other minorities in Croatia. In condemning the entire idea of pan-Slavic nationalism and Yugoslavia, Tudjman’s ideas praised those who had fought against it, including the Ustaše and other fascist organizations (Đurašković, 2016). In 1990, after the breakup of the

Yugoslav Communist Party, Tudjman led his nationalist party to victory in Croatian elections and declared an independent state in Croatia, resulting in a bloody war with the Serbs that ended with Croatian independence.

Thus, claims to nationalist identity resulted in the creation of Croatia. However, it must be remembered that Croats and Serbs had frequently allied with one another in battling both the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarians. Pan-Slavic nationalism, which united Croats and Serbs, was one of the causes of World War I. Following that war, Croats and Serbs joined in creating the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. During these alliances, politicians promoted Serb Croat unity by pointing out that Croats and Serbs speak the same language and are Christians. However, in the context of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, precisely the same traits were cited as differences: Serbs are Eastern Orthodox Christians, but Croats are Catholics; they speak the same language but use different writing systems. The cultural differences between Serbs and Croats could be ignored when historical and political forces favored unity but emphasized when Serb and Croat interests diverged. Conflict between Serbs and Croats is not the inevitable working out of age-old hatred. Rather, small ethnic differences catalyzed a fight over power and material resources.

Ethnicity, Immigration, and Adaptation

Much of the reality of ethnicity derives from state formation as different groups are combined into larger political units. However, ethnicity is also linked to immigration. In some senses, immigration has existed as long as humanity itself. People have always been mobile and moved from group to group. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Jews were a minority group in ancient Egypt. Two thousand years ago, Imperial Rome was a city of immigrants and had, perhaps, hundreds of thousands of people who would today be referred to as members of different ethnic minorities (Wallace-Hadrill, 2017). In the late 1100s, Richard of Devizes wrote that in London, one found “every race of men, out of every nation which is under heaven” (Giles, 2000, p. 49).

Beginning in the 16th century, colonialism increased immigration, and by the 18th and 19th centuries, European nations, particularly France and Great Britain, had become home to large and diverse immigrant communities. Nor was immigration only a European phenomenon. Indian and Chinese cities also have large immigrant populations (Connor, 2017; Pieke, 2019).

The arrival of immigrants often generates debates about the roles, rights, and status of minority communities. For example, England welcomed Jews in the 11th century, but it expelled them at the end of the 13th. Although small Jewish communities persisted, Jews were not officially allowed to return until the middle of the 17th century.

As immigration increased in the 18th and 19th centuries, different societies pursued different policies. For example, in France, there was enormous pressure toward **assimilation**, a process through which immigrants were expected to abandon their distinctive cultures in favor of a single French identity. The idea that immigrant groups continually become more like the dominant culture is called *straight-line convergence*. On the other hand, in Britain, there was more of an idea of multiculturalism. Immigrant groups were expected to retain more of their own identities.

The differing policies of France and Britain were related to practices of colonial governance. French colonial rule was more direct than British rule. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, the French often imagined that everyone in their vast colonial empire would one day become French citizens. However, to do so, they had to become sufficiently like those in France itself. In practice, some groups were considered far more assimilable than others. For example, under colonialism, Muslims in Algeria could practice their religion, but if they did so, they could not vote or have French citizenship. France continues to promote assimilation. In 2004 and 2011, France passed laws banning conspicuous religious symbols and face veils, laws that were widely seen as specifically targeting members of minority religions (Figure 9.11).

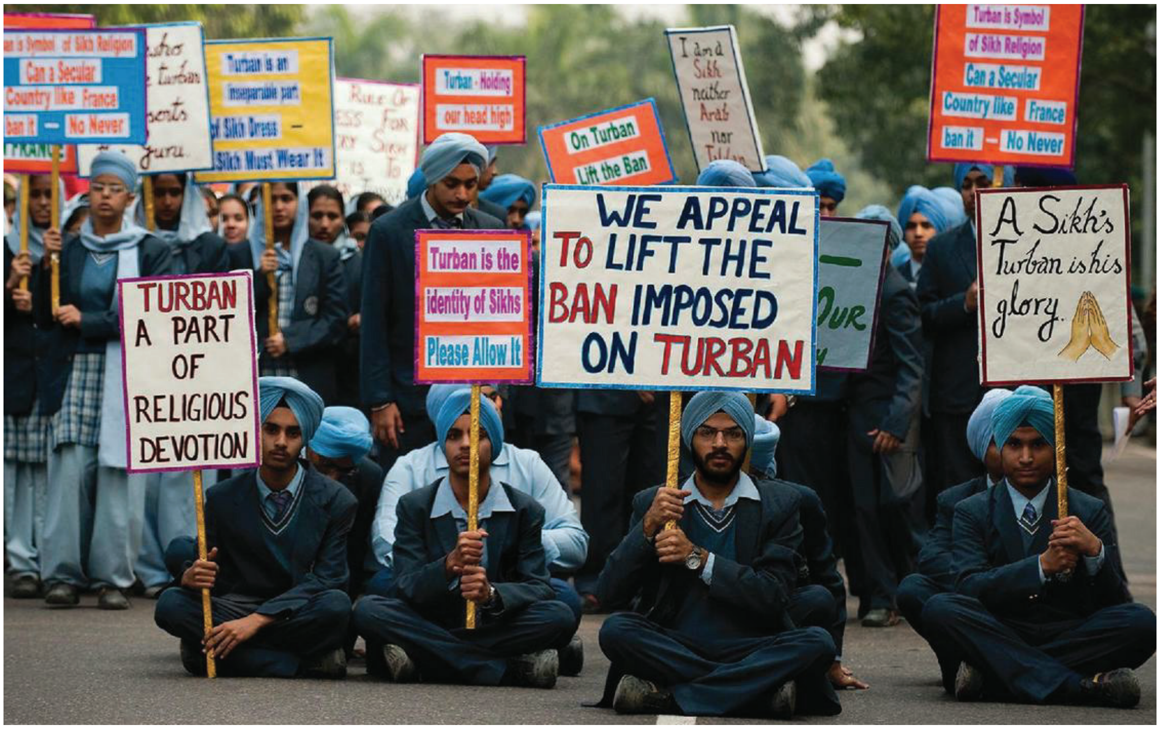

Turban is an inseparable part of Sikh Dress — Sikh Must Wear It
Turban - Holding our head high
On Turban Lift the Ban
I am a Sikh neither Arab nor
Turban is Symbol of Sikh Religion Can a Secular Country like France ban it — No Never
TURBAN A PART OF RELIGIOUS DEVOTION
Turban is the identity of Sikhs Please Allow It
WE APPEAL TO LIFT THE BAN IMPOSED ON TURBAN
A Sikh's Turban is his glory.

Figure 9.11 During a 2010 visit to India by the French president, members of the Sikh community in protested French laws banning wearing conspicuous religious symbols.

MANPREET ROMANA/AFP via Getty Images

Until the mid-20th century, the dominant U.S. ideology regarding immigrants was assimilation. Settlement houses, public schools, and citizenship classes were formed to teach immigrants “American” ways and to motivate them to assimilate. “American” ways were understood primarily as those of the politically and economically dominant white Protestant communities of largely English and Scots heritage. As in France, some groups were considered more assimilable than others. However, by the early 20th century, as immigrants increased in number and the diversity of their origins, the **melting pot analogy** became increasingly popular. The phrase “melting pot” was popularized by a 1908 play called *The Melting Pot* by British author Israel Zangwill. Using the analogy, people compared U.S. society to a stew in which all ethnicities were blended to produce an American identity.

To some extent, the melting pot was an accurate analogy. By the 1950s, the cultural distinctiveness of many ethnic groups had greatly diminished. However, the melting pot analogy referred primarily to ethnic groups descended from European populations. The pot excluded the racially defined minorities such as Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans, as well as Asians and people from the Middle East. Additionally, ethnic identity did not entirely disappear. Some cultural practices remained, as did a tendency for ethnic groups to organize around political goals and to mobilize for access to economic resources.

A second model of assimilation emphasizes the fact that all groups do not necessarily assimilate at the same rate, and some may assimilate very little. This racial and ethnic disadvantage model focuses on the discrimination and the barriers to opportunities that are present for many immigrants.

A third model, segmented assimilation, combines elements of both the other models. This model tries to account for the wide variety of immigrant experiences and the fact that members of a single immigrant group do not necessarily share the same experiences of immigration and assimilation. Proponents of this theory argue that although there are real racial and ethnic barriers to assimilation, different people experience these differently. Those members of an immigrant group that is disadvantaged by poverty, lack of education, or other problems may experience little assimilation, whereas group members who do not have these encumbrances may be far more successful (Brown & Bean, 2006).

All these models view assimilation as a desirable objective. Indeed, to the extent that assimilation means freedom from discrimination; equal access to the law; access to opportunities in employment, housing, education, and other aspects of society; and a sense of membership in the culture, it is hard to see it in anything but a positive light. However, assimilation also entails loss. With assimilation comes the loss of language, cultural customs, and connection to one’s past.

Scholars observing the fact that many groups of long-term immigrants retain some cultural distinctiveness propose a mosaic or salad bowl model of assimilation. They argue that ethnic groups fail to assimilate completely and that, if opportunities and protections are equal for all, this is a good thing. A multiplicity of cultures and identities makes for a rich and dynamic society. Multiculturalism fills society with the customs, points of view, experiences, foods, and celebrations of many of the world's people. The additional knowledge from this informs our understanding and, hopefully, allows us to make better decisions than a single uniform identity would.

IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY IN THE UNITED STATES

In 1643, the Catholic missionary Isaac Jogues (1607–1646) visited the settlement that would become New York City. He found between 400 and 500 men there "of different sects and nations" speaking 18 different languages (quoted in Franklin, 1909, p. 259). Some were probably Native Americans, but most were immigrants. Thus, America, as a place of immigrants from many different places, greatly predates the founding of the United States. As the country grew, so too did the idea of a uniquely American identity arising from the social and political conditions of the United States and the presence of many different immigrant groups. However, the role that immigrants play has often been contentious (Mehta, 2019).

From the beginning, ethnicity has been implicated in the U.S. system of social stratification: The early, idealistic visions of the United States as a land of economic opportunity, upward mobility, and political freedom were largely restricted to immigrants from northern and western Europe. The U.S. Constitution contained no definition of citizenship. However, the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited the naturalization of immigrants (and thus citizenship) to "free white person[s] … of good character." Free white men always had full citizenship rights, including the right to vote. However, the rights of women, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and others deemed by the courts to be nonwhite were restricted.

Until the late 19th century, there were very few laws about immigration to the United States, and the nation’s borders were open. This began to change with the Page Act of 1875, which restricted the immigration of Chinese women. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act became the first law that prevented members of an ethnically defined group from immigrating to the United States. Laws passed between then and 1924 further restricted immigration. Between 1901 and 1910, about 8.8 million people immigrated to the United States (Figure 9.12). Between 1931 and 1940, this number dropped to slightly over a half million, and more than 86% of these were from Europe or Canada and Newfoundland (U.S. Census, 1999, p. 872). The laws effectively limited immigration to Europeans and Canadians. Proponents of such laws explicitly linked immigration restrictions to ideas of racial and ethnic superiority. The amateur anthropologist Madison Grant (1865–1937), in an influential book called *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), claimed that, because they were biologically inferior to northern Europeans, members of the southern and eastern European “races” could never become good American citizens and that the United States would degenerate if it tried to incorporate them. For Grant and his supporters, the immigration of people from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America was even more problematic.

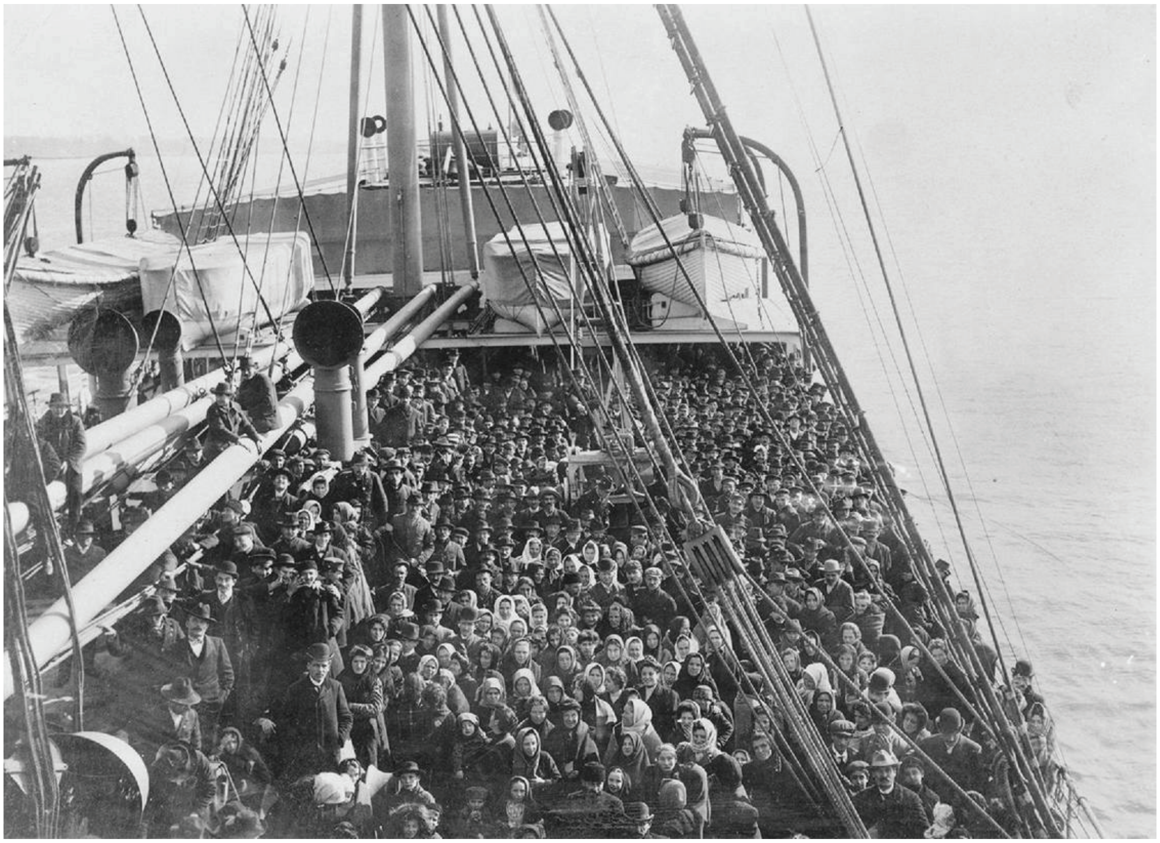


Figure 9.12 Immigrants arrive at Ellis Island, New York, in the early 20th century.

agefotostock/Alamy Stock Photo

Extremely low immigration levels continued from 1924 until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished national quotas and allowed for a far greater number of immigrants. This resulted in a huge increase in immigration from non-European nations. For example, between 1931 and 1960, the average yearly legal immigration was about 135,000, and 72% of these immigrants were from Europe or Canada and Newfoundland. By the 1990s, legal immigration had risen to almost one million a year, even higher than it was in the first years of the 20th century. And less than 15% of immigrants were from Europe (Budiman, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 1949, 2012). Today, the United States is more of a nation of immigrants than at any time since the early part of the 20th century (Figure 9.13). But we are probably experiencing more backlash against immigrants than we have been since that time as well.

Back
KGA
Happy Khmer New Year
Happy Year of the Rabbit

Figure 9.13 The United States is more of a nation of immigrants now than at any time since the early part of the 20th century. Both immigration and the backlash against it have increased. In this picture, girls celebrate Cambodian New Year in Long Beach, California.

Jeff Gritchen/Digital First Media/Orange County Register via Getty Images

One result of high immigration is that the debates of the early 20th century are once again current. Today, as then, there are debates about whether particular groups of immigrants bring with them cultural values and practices such as republicanism, individualism, hard work, thrift, and a commitment to freedom that many believe are consistent with U.S. culture. These were exacerbated by political rhetoric, directed principally against immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and some predominantly Muslim nations. During the Trump administration, anti-immigrant movements gained membership and political traction. For example, Stephen Miller, a senior policy advisor for the administration, had close ties to the Center for Immigration Studies, a group deeply connected to racist writers and white nationalists (SPLC, 2019). At the same time, there has been an increase in violence against members of minority groups by avowed white nationalists, including the mass murder of 11 at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in October 2018 and the mass murder of 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, in August 2019. In February 2018, the words describing America as “a nation of immigrants” were removed from the mission statement of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (Jordan, 2018).

Muslim and Hispanic Immigrants in the United States

Anthropologists studying immigration consider how its contexts are shaped by changing local, national, and global economies and political conditions. These include the rise of international terrorism; the cyclical nature of global, national, and regional economies; the increase in illegal immigration; and the violence that accompanies global political instability.

Immigration from Middle Eastern nations provides a case in point. Before the 1960s, immigrants came from the Middle East in relatively small numbers. They were mainly Christians from Muslim-dominated countries like Syria and Lebanon, who constructed a common ethnic identity as Arab (Ewing, 2008a). The 1965 immigration laws opened the United States to Muslim immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East. Many who came were skilled and highly educated. These new immigrants began organizing as Muslims, focusing on maintaining Islamic religious practices rather than ethnically identifying with their nations of origin. This led to a more public presence of Islam and the expanded construction of mosques and Islamic schools (Abdo, 2006).

After the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, Muslim immigrants, as well as others who looked Middle Eastern, faced deep and occasionally lethal hostility. One example is that, even though no attempt to enact Islamic (Sharia) law has been proposed anywhere in the United States, anti-Sharia law bills have been introduced in 43 states and enacted in Texas and Arkansas (Shanmugasundaram, 2018). In 2017, the Trump administration issued a series of executive orders and presidential proclamations that subjected people from several nations to “enhanced vetting” for immigration. Most of these nations were majority Muslim, but North Korea and Venezuela were also included. The administration cited fears of terrorism to justify its ban. However, as of early 2022, no fatal terror attack had ever been committed on American soil by an individual from a nation covered by the ban. An analysis by Vahid Niayesh (2019) showed that in 2018, there was a sharp decrease in immigration from the Muslim countries included in the ban, but immigration from Venezuela was unchanged and immigration from North Korea increased. The Biden administration revoked the ban as one of its first official acts (Figure 9.14).

Giros
éxico
de 10.000 puntos de pago
en minutos
Envíe $1000
Pague $8
Guatemala
Honduras
Giros
en minutos
Envíe $1000
Pague $8
Riviera Maya
México
Lindo y Querido
Colombia
Giros
Envíe $1000
Pague $8
sos Mexicanos
PRA - VENTA

Figure 9.14 In Queens, a borough of New York City and one of the most diverse places in the United States, a Muslim man walks by a store specializing in phone calls and travel to Latin America.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images

A 2017 poll of American Muslims conducted by the Pew Research Center shows interesting results. Three quarters of respondents to the poll thought that there was a lot of discrimination against Muslims in the United States, and almost 20% said they had been called offensive names in the past year. Six percent also said they had been physically threatened or attacked. All these numbers have risen since 2007. At the same time, more than 90% of those surveyed said they were proud to be Americans, and 80% said they were satisfied with the way that things were going in their own lives. Although they lag behind the general public in homeownership and employment, American Muslims are about as likely as others to have college degrees and household incomes over $100,000 (Diamant, 2017). A 2019 survey showed that Americans felt less positively about Muslims than about any other major religious group (Pew Research Center, 2019b).

Hispanics are the largest generally recognized minority group in the United States. In 2021, the Hispanic population was almost 62.1 million, representing 18.7% of the total U.S. population. The growth of the Hispanic population has slowed over recent years. However, between 2010 and 2020, Latinx people accounted for slightly more than half of all U.S. population growth (Jones et al., 2021). Hispanics are an extremely diverse group. About 62% are Mexican Americans. More than 5.5 million come from Puerto Rico (in addition to the 3.5 million who reside in Puerto Rico and are also U.S. citizens). More than two million each come from El Salvador, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Since 2010, the fastest-growing Hispanic groups have been Venezuelans, Dominicans, and Guatemalans (Noe-Bustamante, 2019). In addition to national origin, Hispanics are diverse in many other ways as well. These include social class, education, religion, language proficiency, and many other attributes.

According to an analysis based on surnames, the first U.S. Census, taken in 1790, recorded about 20,000 Hispanics (Szucs & Hargreaves Luebkin, 1984, p. 361). By 1850, with the addition of the area that now includes the states of Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, the Hispanic population had risen to over 100,000. In 1930, the Hispanic population reached 1.6 million, of whom more than 90% lived in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. For the next several decades, Hispanics continued to concentrate in Texas and the Southwest, but by 1960, the population had reached 4.5 million (Haverluk, 1997). In the years since then, the Hispanic population has grown by more than 1,200%, and Hispanics live in every state. However, about half of U.S. Hispanics continue to live in California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. The states of Florida, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, and Colorado account for another 22% of the Hispanic population (Hernández-Nieto & Gutiérrez, 2017).

The overwhelming majority of the U.S. Hispanic population, almost 80%, comprises U.S. citizens. In addition, there are more than 5 million Hispanics with lawful permanent U.S. residence (Baker, 2019). However, of the 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States in 2017, about 65% are from Mexico and Central America (Lopez et al., 2021).

The rapid demographic change in the United States has made immigration a focus of political debate. Much of this is centered on the role of illegal immigration. In some states, laws were enacted that required or authorized police to demand proof of citizenship or legal residency from all people who look like they might be immigrants. In other places, states and municipalities (so-called sanctuary cities) passed laws that forbade police from cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Figure 9.15).

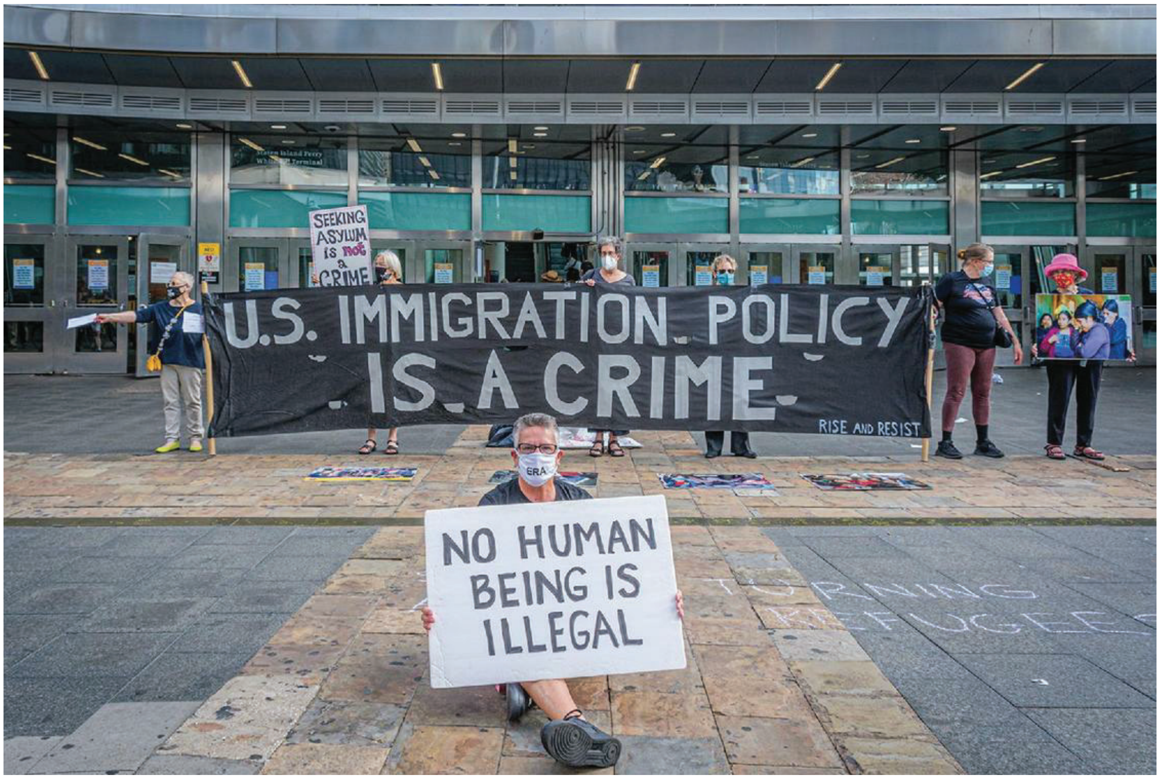

SEEKING ASYLUM IS not a CRIME
U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY IS A CRIME
RISE AND RESIST
ERA
NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL

Figure 9.15 Some municipalities, including New York, passed laws that forbade police from cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Here people protest in New York City in 2021.

Erik McGregor/LightRocket via Getty Images

The large numbers of illegal Hispanic immigrants form a sort of unofficial underclass. Frequently laboring under difficult conditions in agriculture, construction, and domestic service, usually for very low wages, they are an easily exploitable group. They lack the full protection of the law granted to citizens and legal residents, and they often do not take advantage of the rights they legally have for fear of deportation and other penalties. In fiscal year 2019, almost 360,000 undocumented immigrants were deported, a substantial rise from 2017 and 2018 but fewer than the 432,000 removed in 2013. Deportations have declined sharply under the Biden administration (Economist, 2021; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

The Globalization of Ethnicity

Historically, one of the aspects of immigration was that immigrants were effectively cut off from their lands of origin. Although they often came with the idea of returning and many did keep in touch with family members and friends they had left behind, immigrants' ties to their home countries were generally slight. There were problems of poor communication, expensive and sometimes dangerous travel, and increasing assimilation into American culture. However, this might be changing. Consider the costs of talking to someone in a different country. Today, anyone with a smartphone and Internet connection can use services such as Facetime, WhatsApp, or Skype to video chat with another person almost anywhere in the world for free. In 1982, a 5-minute telephone call from New York to Japan cost $18.36 in 2022 dollars (*New York Times*, 1982). This was considered a bargain, and compared to earlier rates, it was. In 1950, a 3-minute call from Boston to London cost almost $139 in 2022 dollars (Chaddock, 1997).[2] Relatively inexpensive and safe air transportation puts frequent visits between immigrants and family members within the range of vast numbers of people. In 1955, a round-trip ticket from New York to London would cost about $5,500 (in 2019 dollars). Today, the same flight can be made for under $600 (Novak, 2013).

Technological and economic changes mean that connections between recent immigrants and their home cultures are likely to remain far stronger than they did in the past. Additionally, these forces enable the descendants of people who came to the United States many years ago to connect with people and influence politics in their places of origin. For example, the population of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland today is about 6 million. However, almost 31.6 million people who claim Irish ancestry are living in the United States (Moore et al., 2021). Most Irish Americans are generations removed from emigration and have few actual family ties in Ireland. However, the money they spend on tourism there and their support of Irish political causes can have deep effects on that nation.

The entire idea of a home culture linked to a specific place may be declining. Ethnic groups today are often enormous diasporas of people living throughout the world. In 2020, more than 280 million people, more than 3% of the world's population, lived outside of the country in which they were born (UN, 2020). This number would be much higher if we added the number of people who were born in one country yet consider themselves members of ethnic groups associated with a different nation. For example, there are about 60 million overseas Chinese (Chinese nationals and people of Chinese descent living outside of China) residing in 148 different countries (Poston & Wong, 2016). This is a population about the size of Italy's.

Almost 50 nations have at least 10% of their population living outside of the country of their birth. For example, in 2017, 28% of people born in Jamaica lived in other countries (Pew Research Center, 2019a). In many cases, these individuals join already large ethnic communities in their new countries. The impacts of such communities, both on their countries of residence and their countries of origin, are hard to gauge. However, they are likely to have deep effects on what it means to be a member of an ethnic group.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: INEQUALITY, RACE, ETHNICITY, AND COVID-19

In the spring of 2020, as COVID-19 spread around the world, corporations and news outlets broadcast the encouraging message that we were "all in this together." That may be true, but we were not all in it equally. Like the effects of other disasters, the weight of COVID-19 will almost certainly fall more heavily on the poor and members of minority groups. Preliminary data available in 2022 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022b)[2] show that they, both in the United States and elsewhere, have suffered the greatest toll.

The measures prescribed to protect oneself from COVID-19 and slow its spread are not available equally. Wealthier people have large homes or apartments where they can easily quarantine themselves. They are likely to have secure jobs they can do from home. They ride in their own cars and have low-risk access to food and supplies through services such as Uber Eats and Instacart. Poorer people are more likely to live in smaller, more crowded conditions. Their jobs are often less secure and more likely to involve working outside the home. They are more likely to use public transportation and be required to take greater risks to get food and other supplies. Often, they are the very people who enable the security of those wealthier than themselves. For millions around the world who are homeless, stay-at-home orders are impossible. They cannot observe quarantine, and, for them, access to necessities such as clean water for handwashing can be very difficult.

COVID-19 has had a profound effect in wealthy countries. However, its effect in poorer countries is likely to be even more devastating and prevention measures more difficult. For example, on March 25, 2020, India’s prime minister ordered a lockdown. India is believed to have at least 120 million migrant workers. Many lived in dorms that were closed, and others were required to return to their hometowns. People crowded on public transportation, likely spreading the virus (Figure 9.16). However, the transportation system was soon overwhelmed, and more than half a million tried to walk to their homes, which were often hundreds of miles away. Numerous deaths, both the result of physical strain and road accidents, were reported. In some cases, migrants were beaten by police who claimed they were simply trying to manage the crowds (Frayer & Pathak, 2020).

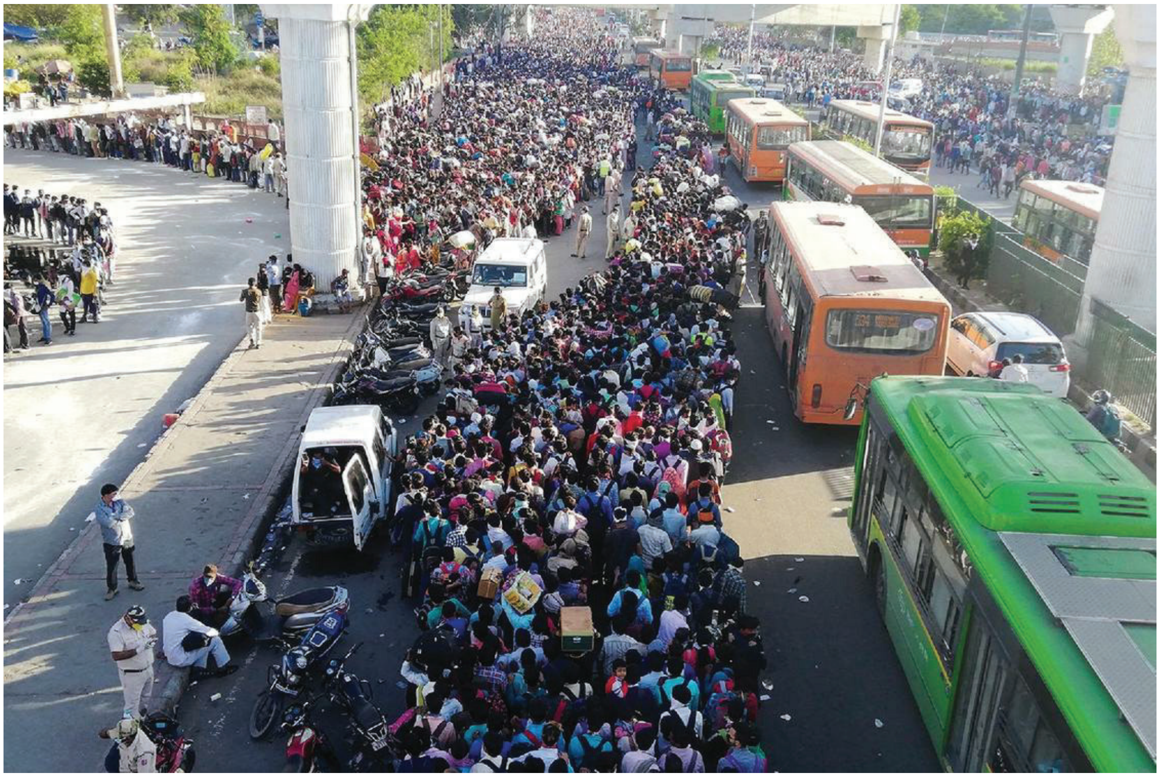


Figure 9.16 Migrant workers swarm the Anand Vihar bus terminal in New Delhi on March 28, 2020, as they try to return to their hometowns. Inadequate public transportation meant that many attempted to walk.

BHUVAN BAGGA/AFP via Getty Images

In the United States, the effects of COVID-19 exposed racial and ethnic inequalities and, in some cases, exacerbated tensions. In the spring of 2020, African Americans bore a horrifying toll. In early April 2020, in Louisiana, African Americans made up 32% of the population but 70% of COVID-19 deaths. In Michigan, the death rate for African Americans was eight times the death rate for whites, and in Chicago, 72% of the deaths were of African Americans, more than twice their percentage in the population (Thomas & Anoruo, 2020). Between March 1, 2020, and January 8, 2022, COVID-19 hospitalization rates for African Americans were 2.5 times higher and death rates 1.7 times higher than for white non-Hispanic persons. The numbers for Native Americans were substantially worse (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2022a). These appalling numbers reflect the structural vulnerabilities of the Black and Native American population, which is poorer, more likely to have health conditions such as hypertension or diabetes, and less likely to have high-quality health insurance than Americans in general. These problems were further heightened by the slow, inconsistent, and biased government response. An analysis of Philadelphia, for example, showed that in March and April 2020, testing for the disease was six times greater in wealthier ZIP codes than in poorer ones (Reid, 2020).

The virus increased ethnic tensions as well. Throughout 2020, President Trump repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the “Chinese Virus,” “Kung Flu,” or the “China Virus.” A well-reported incident shows him altering notes for a press briefing to replace COVID-19 with “Chinese.” The Chinese government does bear some responsibility for ignoring early warning signs of the disease and failing to contain it adequately. This includes the government’s silencing of Li Wenliang, a doctor who warned about the virus in December 2019 and later died of it (BBC News, 2020). However, naming diseases after locations or ethnic groups is solidly rejected by the medical community (WHO, 2015). Although no American official publicly attacked Chinese or Asian Americans, numerous Republicans followed Trump’s lead in using the phrase “Chinese Virus” and criticizing Chinese culture (KXAN, 2020). Hate crimes and racist slurs against Asian Americans increased. Between March 2020 and September 30, 2021, Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition that gathers data on racially motivated attacks related to the pandemic, reported more than 10,000 pandemic-related racially motivated attacks against people of Asian descent (Yellow Horse et al., 2021). San Francisco reported a more than 500% increase in such crimes from the previous year (Associated Press, 2022).

As we write this in summer 2022, COVID-19 remains an existential threat to the way of life of people around the world. By the time you read these words, the situation will be different—maybe worse, but hopefully better. Combating COVID-19 could have showcased the best of humanity. Governments and people might have united in effective scientific and social action to control the disease. Instead, exacerbated by nationalist leaders in the United States, Europe, India, Brazil, and China, government responses have often been inadequate and sometimes shameful. Leaders have used COVID-19 to stoke division and outrage and to augment their own power. We hold out hope that this will change and that insights from anthropology and other fields can help us realize that, though we may not all be in this equally, we are indeed all in this together.

You Decide

1. How did the COVID-19 crisis affect you personally?
2. What approaches to controlling COVID-19 succeeded, and what approaches were ineffective?
3. In what ways can insights from anthropology be useful in understanding and controlling COVID-19 and similar epidemics in the future?

SUMMARY

1. How many biological races of humanity are there? From a biological perspective, there is no meaningful way to divide humanity into races. There is only one human race.
2. What are some key fallacies of attempts to divide people into biological races? There is no reason to think that characteristics chosen to delineate race are more important than those that are not. Most such characteristics show great variability. Choosing different characteristics to delineate race would result in very different races. Differences within so-called racial groups are as great or greater than those between them.
3. How did understandings of race develop in the United States? Race ideas in the United States were built around the historical conditions of African slavery. For slavery to work, people needed to be assigned to unambiguous groups. Thus, racial purity was emphasized. The ideas derived from the slave-based relationship

between whites and Blacks were expanded to include other groups.

4. How do life chances relate to race in the United States? Numerous measures show that there are critical disparities in education, health outcomes, life expectancy, income, and wealth between members of different socially defined races. Throughout U.S. history, public policy has very frequently acted to reinforce rather than ameliorate these differences.
5. What is the purpose of the *RACE* project? The *RACE* project is a website and traveling museum exhibit that demonstrates that although race is a scientifically invalid concept, racial categories are important in many systems of social stratification. It focuses attention on the interrelations among race, history, and social stratification.
6. How is racial classification in Brazil different from racial classification in the United States? In the United States, race is historically a system of caste. Racial identity is fixed at birth, and people are understood as members of one of a small number of races. In Brazil, there are many more racial categories, and members of a single family may identify with different categories. The Brazilian government has promoted a multiracial idea of national identity. However, there is strong racial inequality in both systems, with people classified as white enjoying better access to wealth, education, health, and prestige occupations.
7. What is ethnicity, and what role does it play in conflict? Ethnicity refers to perceived differences between groups. Ethnic differences have often been considered the root of conflict. However, ethnicities are shaped by historical processes and emerge and change as the result of specific historical, demographic, and economic circumstances. Ethnic conflict in the former state of Yugoslavia in the 1990s is a good illustration of the historical and political nature of ethnicity.
8. How have minority ethnic groups been integrated into nation-states? Most nation-states include substantial ethnic communities. In the 18th and 19th centuries, nation-states often pursued strong policies of assimilation in which ethnic groups were to be submerged in a nation. In the 20th and 21st centuries,

many nations have welcomed immigrants, and debates over their assimilation are intense. Official policies may strongly favor assimilation or favor immigrants retaining at least some cultural distinctiveness.

9. How has immigration and ethnicity in the United States changed over the nation's history? The U.S. population has included people of different, non–Native American identities since colonial times. There were very few laws about immigration to the United States until the late 19th century. But between 1882 and 1924, immigration became much more restricted. It continued so until the 1960s. In recent decades, immigration to the United States has greatly increased. This has rekindled debates about immigration.
10. What particular issues have affected Muslim and Hispanic immigrants? Muslim immigrants have faced particular discrimination since the terror attacks of 9/11, and Hispanics are the largest immigrant group in the United States and have accounted for more than half of the U.S. population growth in recent decades. This has made them the targets of attack by populist politicians.
11. How did the COVID-19 pandemic expose social divisions? In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 affected most places in the world. In the United States, the wealthy were more able to protect themselves than the poor. Black communities suffered particularly high losses, and Asian ethnic communities were blamed and sometimes attacked solely because the disease originated in China.

Key Terms

assimilation (p. 262)

ethnicity (p. 259)

life chances (p. 254)

melting pot analogy (p. 263)

race (p. 244)

Notes

1. When the experiment, officially called the “USPHS Syphilis Study at Tuskegee,” began in 1932, there were no effective treatments for syphilis. When such treatments became available in the early 1940s, they were not offered to the participants. The experiment continued for almost 30 years longer, until 1972, when unfavorable publicity brought it to a close. The participants sued for damages and received a $10 million out-of-court settlement. President Bill Clinton offered a presidential apology in 1996 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

2. Rates calculated from original sources adjusted for inflation.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

Back to Figure

The first map, the map of Yugoslavia in 1989 includes Ljubljana, Zagreb, Split, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Skopje. The second map, the map of Yugoslavia after its disintegration includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo.

PART III FAMILIES IN SOCIETY

10 KINSHIP

Kinship is the way in which we understand who we are related to and how we are related to them. Different societies have different patterns of kinship. This collage shows family pictures from early 20th-century Belarus.

iStockphoto.com/yuri4u80

Learning Objectives

10.1 Explain what a kinship system is and relate it to ideas about descent and group membership.

10.2 Summarize the main characteristics of patrilineal descent and evaluate its continuing importance.

10.3 Describe matrilineal descent and analyze its impact on gender relations.

10.4 List non-unilineal descent systems and compare them with unilineal descent systems.

10.5 Distinguish between the key characteristics used in the classification of kin and give examples of different kinship systems.

10.6 Assess the role of kinship in immigration and transmigration.

In American society, when you meet someone for the first time, you generally try to find some area of common interest. You may ask where the other person is from, what schools they went to, what their occupation is, or what hobbies or interests they have. Even though kinship is important in American society, most people are quite unlikely to ask a new acquaintance about their grandparents, parents, and siblings. However, in most societies and in most of history, these are among the first questions new acquaintances might ask one another. In most places and at most times, kinship has been central to identity. Through kinship, people often gain access to political power, land, trade, and marriage partners, as well as protection from all those who are not kin, whether neighbors or strangers. In societies where the population is low and formal political institutions few, kinship is central to social and economic organization. Decision making and power often flow along kin lines. However, as viewers of the popular HBO show *Succession*, or observers of economic and political dynasties such as the Murdock, Koch, Trump, Bush, Clinton, Kardashian, Kennedy, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Ford, Getty, and Walton families know, the power of kinship is alive and well in the modern world.

Because it was central to societies they studied, and indeed to their own society, kinship was one of the early interests of anthropologists. Nineteenth-century scholars such as Lewis Henry Morgan wrote extensively about it. Some of the terms and ideas that Morgan developed a century and a half ago are still useful today. In this chapter, we introduce you to some of the vocabulary and some of the key concepts in the anthropological study of kinship. We explore the nature of kinship, the different systems of kinship found around the world, and the implications kinship systems have for the societies that use them.

KINSHIP: RELATIONS THROUGH DESCENT AND MARRIAGE

Kinship refers to those relationships understood in a society as connecting people through descent and marriage. In almost all societies, kinship is a basis of group formation, and relationships between individuals are governed by kinship norms. The extension of kinship ties is the main way of allying groups to one another and incorporating strangers into a group. In most of the world's cultures, kinship is central in determining people's rights and responsibilities.

In current-day industrial and postindustrial societies, principles of social organization other than kinship, such as work, interests, religion, and politics, are important as bases for group formation and are frameworks within which individual rights and obligations are articulated. This does not mean that kinship is insignificant, however. Inheritance of property occurs mainly along kinship lines. A person claiming a kin relation is regarded differently from someone who is not a relative, and there is a strong sentiment that "blood is thicker than water." Groups of relatives are important on ritual occasions. For example, in the United States, Thanksgiving and religious occasions such as baptisms, confirmations, bar and bat mitzvahs, quinceañeras, weddings, and funerals are all occasions for the gathering of kin and frequently the celebration of kinship. Family membership also plays an important role in determining people's wealth and life chances (Figure 10.1).

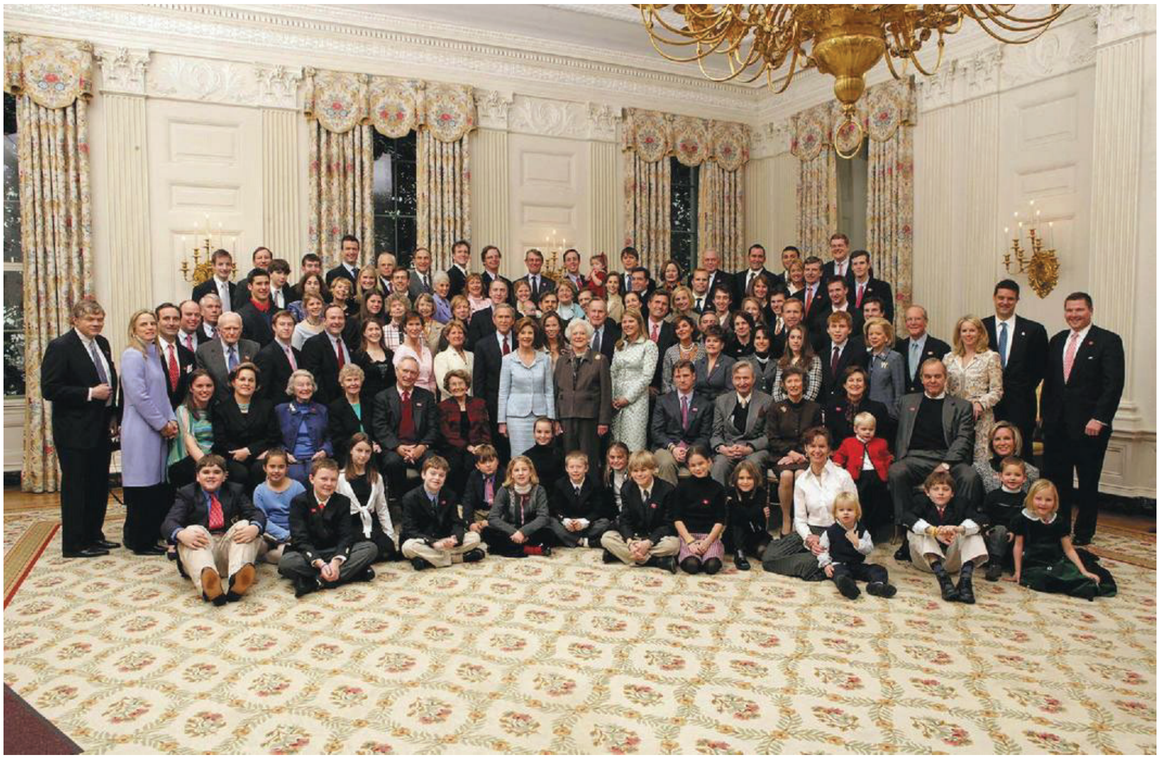


Figure 10.1 The continuing importance of families in the

United States is illustrated by politically powerful families such as the Bushes or Kennedys. Here, the Bush family poses for a portrait in the East Room of the White House in 2005.

Eric Draper/WireImage/Getty Images

Kinship includes relationships based on descent and relationships formed through marriage. In every society, the formation of groups and the regulation of behavior depend to some extent on socially recognized ties of kinship. Because aspects of kinship such as behavior, ideology, and terminology are closely related, anthropologists refer to kinship as a system. A **kinship system** includes all relationships based on descent and marriage that link people in a web of rights and obligations, the groups formed in a society based on such rights and obligations, and the terms used to classify different kin.

The ways in which a society classifies kin are cultural and may not reflect a scientifically accurate assessment of biological ties. Consider how we use the word *father*. The person you call father may or may not be your biological father. If you are adopted, the person you call father may not be biologically related to you, but he is nevertheless your father. You may also use the same term for priests and ministers.

Because kinship systems are cultural creations, different societies classify relatives in very different ways. The kinds of social groups formed by kinship and how kin are expected to behave toward one another also vary widely. Culturally defined ties of kinship have at least three basic functions that are necessary for the continuation of society. First, kinship provides continuity between generations. In all societies, children must be cared for and educated so that they can become functioning members of their society. The kinship system plays a critical role in this task. Second, societies must also provide for the orderly transmission of property and social position between generations. In most human societies, **inheritance** (the transfer of property) and **succession** (the transfer of social position) take place within kin groups. Finally, kinship defines a universe of others to whom a person has specific obligations, often including aid or support. People in all societies are likely to turn to their relatives for support and alliances.

Rules of Descent and the Formation of Descent Groups

In anthropological terminology, **descent** refers to how people calculate kin relations from earlier to later generations. In most societies, descent is an important basis of social group formation. A **descent group** is a group of people who understand themselves as similar because they share ancestry. Descent groups have important functions in the organization of domestic life, the enculturation of children, the use and transfer of property and political and ritual offices, the carrying out of religious rituals, the settlement of disputes, and political organization and warfare.

Two basic types of descent rules, or kinship ideology, operate in society: unilineal and bilateral. In a cultural system with a rule of **unilineal descent**, descent group membership is based on links through either the paternal or the maternal line but not both. There are two principal types of unilineal descent: patrilineal descent and matrilineal descent. In societies with **patrilineal descent**, a person belongs to the descent group of their father. In societies with **matrilineal descent**, a person belongs to the descent group of the mother. Both patrilineal and matrilineal descent groups are often broken down into clans and lineages.

A **clan** is a group of kin who trace their connections to a common ancestor, but the precise historical nature of the connection is unclear. It is common for clans to trace their ancestry to animals, culture heroes, or gods. Clans are often named and may have a totem—a feature of the natural environment with which they are closely identified and toward which the clan members behave in a special way.

One of the most important functions of a clan is to regulate marriage. In most societies that have clans, they are governed by a rule of **exogamy**: Clan members must choose a marriage partner from outside the clan. The prohibition against marriage within the clan strengthens its unilineal character. If a person married within the clan, their children would find it impossible to make the sharp distinction between maternal and paternal relatives required by unilineal systems. Robert H. Lowie, a student of Franz Boas who studied Native Americans, wrote of the Crow, among whom clans are very important, that a Crow who married within his clan would

> lose his bearings and perplex his tribesmen. For he owes specific obligations to his father's relatives and others to his mother's, who are now hopelessly confused. The sons of his father's clan ought to be censors, whereas his mother's are bound to shield him from criticism; but now the very same persons are his joking relatives and his clansmen! (1948, p. 237)

Such a person would not know how to act toward others, nor would others know how to act toward him. The requirement to marry outside of one's clan also extends the network of peaceful social relations within a society since clans connect through the marriages of their members.

A **lineage** is a group of kin who trace their connections through known historic links to a common ancestor. Lineages may vary in time depth, from three generations upward. Lineages formed by descent through the male line are called **patrilineages**. Lineages formed by descent through the female line are called **matrilineages**. Lineages are frequently members of larger groups called clans.

A lineage is often a local residential or domestic group whose members cooperate daily. In many cases, lineages are corporate groups: They, rather than individuals, hold ownership of land and other productive resources. Clans, on the other hand, are generally not residential units. Their members are usually spread out over many villages. Therefore, clans often have political and religious functions rather than primarily domestic and economic ones.

Unilineal descent systems contrast with the bilateral systems of descent with which most of us are more familiar. Most people in the United States and many other large-scale current-day societies understand kinship bilaterally. In societies using **bilateral descent**, both maternal and paternal lines are used as the basis for reckoning descent and for establishing the rights and obligations of kinship. In other words, in a unilineal descent society, a person is understood as being a descendent from their mother’s line *or* their father’s line but not from both. In a bilateral society, an individual is understood as being a descendent of their mother’s line *and* their father’s line. For most people in U.S. society, family names move patrilineally (you carry your father’s surname), but we consider ourselves equally related to both sides of our family.

A major distinction between systems of unilineal and bilateral descent is that in unilineal kinship systems, kin groups do not overlap. In bilateral kin systems, they do. For example, consider your father’s brother’s children (your paternal cousins). In the U.S. bilateral kinship system, they are your cousins and therefore members of your kin. However, they are equally related to their mother’s family, but this family is unlikely to be related to you. Thus, they are members of two kin groups: They are members of your kin group and their mother’s kin group (to which you do not belong). If the system were patrilineal, your paternal cousins would be part of your kin group but *not* part of their mother’s kin group. They would belong to only one kin group. Unilineal descent thus provides unambiguous membership in a single kin group for everyone in the society.

If all families had the same number of children, more people would be kin to each other in a bilateral system than in a unilineal system. However, because kinship is overlapping in a bilateral system, people in a unilineal system are bound more tightly to one another than those in a bilateral system. Most societies throughout the world have unilineal kinship. However, many of the world’s largest societies practice bilateral kinship, and it is particularly common in Western industrial societies.

In addition to matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilateral descent, a small number of societies practice double descent or ambilineal descent. In **double descent** societies, an individual inherits some things from their mother’s side of the family and different types of things from their father’s. In **ambilineal descent** societies, individuals must choose whether to ally themselves with their mother’s or their father’s side of the family.

Anthropology Makes a Difference: Kinship Rules and Realities in a Korean Village

The rules of kinship in Korean villages emphasize descent through the father’s line, the power of older siblings over younger ones, and Confucian ethics that stress the obligations of sons to their father. The main rule of inheritance is primogeniture: The oldest son inherits all of his father’s property. This reminds us that systems of inheritance are also systems of disinheritance. In systems of primogeniture, most children have few claims to their family’s property. However, one of the ways anthropology makes a difference is that it opens our eyes to the realities of kinship dynamics as people depart from the rules and adapt to changing circumstances.

In Korea, as elsewhere, people manipulate kinship rules for their own advantage. Inheritance and succession to family headship are contested as family members try to ensure that their contributions to the family are acknowledged and rewarded. The times when family property is divided are particularly important occasions for the reckoning of the balance of credits and debts among family members (Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2 Many Koreans perform ancestral rituals at the holiday of Chusok, offering food from the new harvest to their ancestors.

Hemis/Alamy Stock Photo

According to the local rules of inheritance in Pine Tree, a Korean village studied by anthropologist Soo Ho Choi, the eldest son gets the lion’s share of his family’s property, including his parents’ house and more than half their land. In return, he must care for his elderly parents and worship them as ancestors after their deaths. However, the realities of contemporary life often lead to conflict and departure from these rules. Factors such as the money family members may give to buy land or to educate children and the extensive gifts and financial support that some women receive at the time of their marriages often cause modification to the system.

In-depth ethnography enables anthropologists to see how the realities of relationships play out to subvert the rules of kinship. In one family studied by Choi, Sungjo, a frail boy who had one brother and two sisters, was his mother’s favorite. Sungjo’s poor health did not bode well for success in farming, and his mother was determined to have him educated in the city. She persuaded her husband to sell one third of their land to finance Sungjo’s education. The sale was opposed by his siblings, who now had to work much harder to compensate for the lost income. To earn additional cash, the female family members wove cotton and silk cloth, and Sungjo’s elder brother collected and sold natural lacquer extracted from the nearby woods.

After Sungjo graduated from university, he worked for a big corporation and lived comfortably in Seoul. From his family's perspective, he neglected those left behind in the village, failing to fulfill their expectations of compassionate generosity and perform the ritual duties of ancestor worship.

Sungjo's elder brother, Sungman, had no sons and died young. According to the cultural rules, Sungman's wife should have adopted Sungjo's oldest son, entitling this boy to perform the ancestral rites and ultimately inherit Sungman's property. However, Sungman's wife and daughters felt that this was keenly unjust. They believed that since the family had sacrificed to send Sungjo to school, his family had already received its inheritance. Sungman's wife refused to adopt Sungjo's son and performed the ancestor rites herself. Performing these rites is financially critical because it leads to eventual ownership of ancestral land. Sungman's wife performed the ancestral rites for 20 years until she was unable to continue, at which point her eldest daughter took over the performance and claimed the right to Sungman's property.

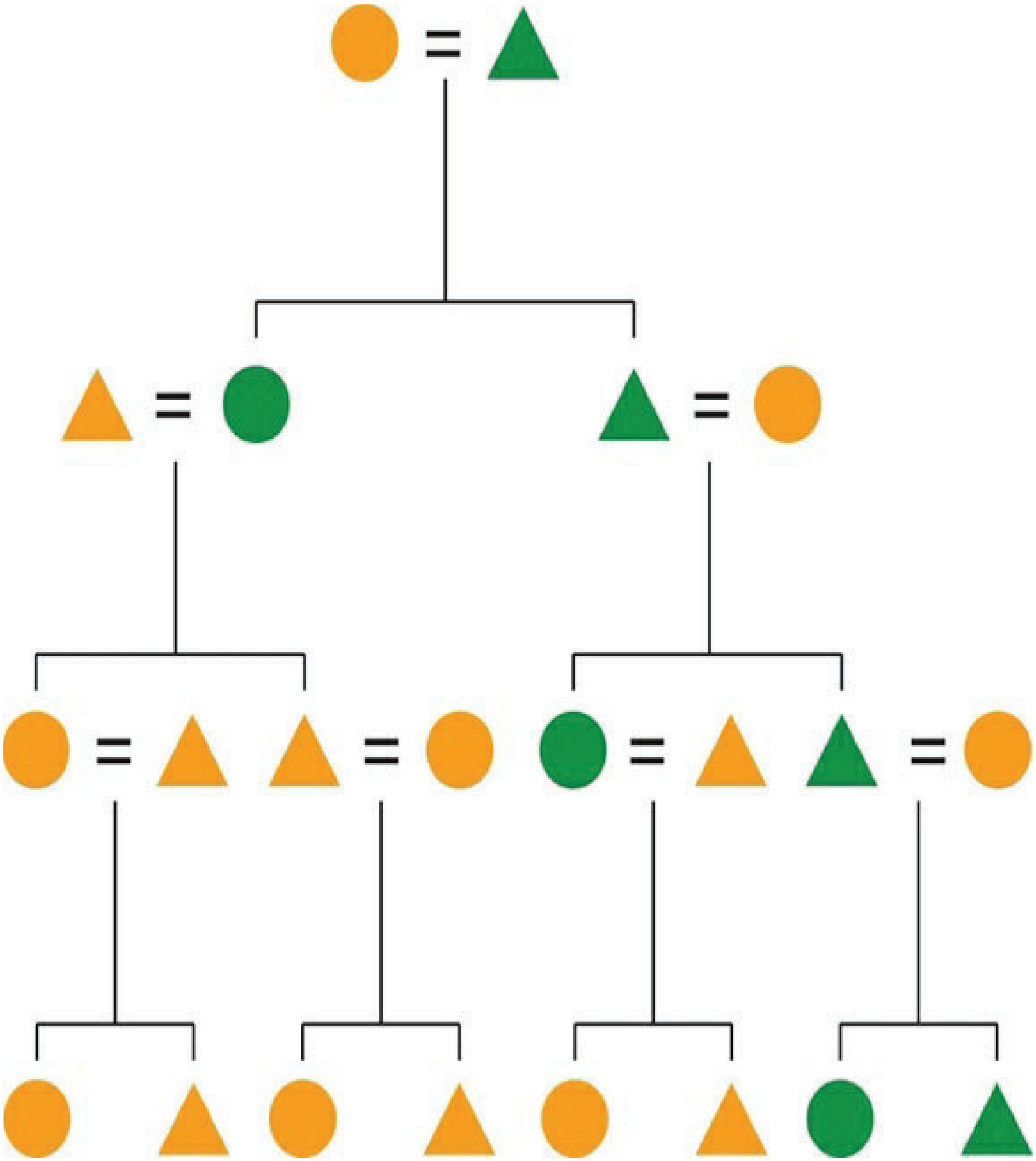
Sungjo opposed his brother's daughter's claim and insisted that his eldest son should be adopted into Sungman's lineage. He used a legal maneuver to get his son ownership of Sungman's land. However, Sungman's daughter refused to acknowledge this change in ownership and continued farming the land and performing the ancestral rituals. Things became more complicated when she married. Although she continued to claim rights to the property and perform the rituals, her marriage considerably weakened her claims. She remained part of her father's lineage, but her children belonged to the lineage of her husband. Therefore, the property she inherited would pass from her father's lineage to her husband's. For this reason, Sungjo's elder sister sided with him. She argued that she had sacrificed for Sungjo's education but had received nothing.

At the time of Choi's research, it was not clear if Sungjo's claim, based on traditional practices and rules of inheritance, would prevail or if Sungman’s daughter’s family, who based their case on debts they believed Sungjo owed, would retain the land.

A central function of kinship rules is to smooth the transfer of office and property between generations. But, as Sungjo’s family history illustrates, cultural rules may be contested. Cultural institutions like kinship are closely intertwined with critically important issues such as access to land, wealth, and property. It is rare for individual behavior and the actual structure of families to perfectly match cultural expectations. As a result, people disadvantaged by rules of kinship and inheritance frequently feel they have good grounds for contesting these rules. When economic systems change, people’s behavior is likely to depart further from the rules, and this leads to both increased conflict and changes in the rules themselves.

PATRILINEAL DESCENT

In societies with patrilineal descent groups, a person (whether male or female) belongs to the descent group of their father, their father’s father, and so on (Figure 10.3). Thus, a man, his sisters and brothers, his brother’s children (but not his sister’s children), his own children, and his son’s children (but not his daughter’s children) all belong to the same group. Inheritance moves from father to son, as does succession to office.



Description

Figure 10.3 A patrilineal descent group. In societies with patrilineal descent groups, membership is based on links

through the father only. Sons and daughters are members of their father’s descent group (shown in green), as are the children of the sons, but not the children of daughters or those related by marriage (shown in yellow).

The Nuer and the Continued Relevance of Segmentary Lineages

The Nuer, a pastoral people who live in South Sudan in East Africa, have a patrilineal society. Among the Nuer, all rights, privileges, obligations, and interpersonal relationships are regulated by kinship; one is either a kinsman or an enemy. Membership in a patrilineal descent group is a critical fact of life, and a man or woman’s father, brothers, and children are considered the closest kin. Membership in a patrilineage confers rights to land, requires participation in certain religious ceremonies, and determines political and judicial obligations, such as making alliances in feuds and warfare.

The Nuer are divided into about 20 clans, each of which is further divided into lineages. Below the level of the clan are segments called maximal lineages, which are broken down into major lineages. Major lineages are subdivided into minor lineages, which in turn are made up of minimal lineages. The minimal lineage contains three to five generations and is the basic descent group that functions in day-to-day activities. Members of a minimal lineage live in the same village and regard one another as close relatives.

Groups above the minimal lineage spread over several villages and thus help create alliances between otherwise independent villages. Nuer clans composed of related lineages are spread over a larger area. Because a person cannot marry someone from within their own lineage or clan or from the lineage of their mother, kinship relations extend widely throughout the tribe.

The Nuer have no centralized system of political authority; instead, the system of lineages and clans serves to regulate conflict. Minimal lineages are politically independent, and higher-order lineages and clans do not have any corporate life. Their members do not live together or hold property in common. Rather, they are called upon to function mainly in the context of conflict. In a serious dispute between members of different lower-order lineages, the higher-order lineage members take the side of their nearest kin. Because the Nuer believe that kin should not fight with one another, disputes within the lineage or clan tend to be kept small and settled rapidly (Evans-Pritchard, 1968/1940). However, because all who are not in some way kin are enemies, an attack on one lineage segment may cause all members of a clan to coalesce against a common enemy (Sahlins, 1961). Thus, clans and lineages function as contingent alliance networks rather than as formal parts of the political structure. This kind of political structure is called a **segmentary lineage system**.

Segmentary lineage systems are particularly effective in conflict. The lack of centralized leadership, combined with the strong tendency of lineages to ally when faced with outside attack, directs the energies of the society away from competition between kin and an outside enemy. Lineage segments on the borders of other tribes know that if they attack an enemy, they will be helped by other lineages related to them at these higher levels of organization.

The Nuer segmentary lineage shows the continued importance of both kin groupings and anthropological thinking. The original fieldwork among the Nuer was done in the 1920s and 1930s but remains critical today.

Segmentary lineage systems are widely distributed in Africa and other places. Jacob Moscona and his colleagues (2017) wondered about the effect of such systems on relations among people in society and how society is held together. They considered these in terms of Robert Putnam’s (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding connects members of a group to one another. Bonding mechanisms emphasize homogeneity and exclusivity. Bridging mechanisms, on the other hand, connect different groups across society. Putnam argued that generalized trust in society is greater when there are bridging mechanisms that cross-cut families as well as bonding mechanisms that increase solidarity within families. In other words, social trust is increased if people are members of social groups that include members of many different kin groups. Since societies with segmentary lineage systems emphasize kin relations over other kinds of connections, they offer an opportunity to test this.

Moscona et al. (2017) used historical anthropological data to identify African ethnic groups that had segmentary lineage systems. They identified 74 groups from all over the continent with strong histories of segmentary lineage, as well as another 71 without this system of descent. They then used data from surveys done by the nonpartisan research group Afrobarometer that provided a variety of measures of trust in relatives versus trust in nonrelatives. They found that people in both segmentary and other lineages had similar levels of trust for family members, but those who lived in societies with segmentary lineage systems had significantly lower trust in nonfamily members than those who lived in societies with other types of kinship. Moscona and colleagues write that the reduced trust in nonkin is probably the result of reduced interaction among nonrelated people in these kinds of societies. In a separate article, Moscona and colleagues (2018) report that ethnic groups with social structures based on segmentary lineage show a greater propensity for violent conflict than other groups.

The Nuer and numerous other groups that use similar kin systems live in South Sudan and parts of Ethiopia and Somalia. These are some of the world’s most violent places. The Nuer homeland in South Sudan has been the center of a horrific civil war. Between December 2013 and February 2020, nearly 400,000 were killed and 2.27 million became refugees. Although, as of early 2022, much of the violence has ended, the situation is still very unstable. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that there are more than 8 million people in need and 1.4 million children are suffering from malnutrition (UNOCHA, 2022; Figure 10.4). Most wars are fought over economic and political power, and this one is no exception. However, the pattern of alliances, killings, and depredations is deeply linked to kinship patterns. Carol Berger (2014) has noted that kinship networks have reinforced and magnified the cycle of killing and revenge and that kin ties reveal much more about power than do charts of government or military command. Lineages and clans in Somalia have a structure similar to that of the Nuer, and this is part of the reason for continued violence and the failure of centralized government in that country. Settling disputes in these places will require a wealth of anthropological knowledge.

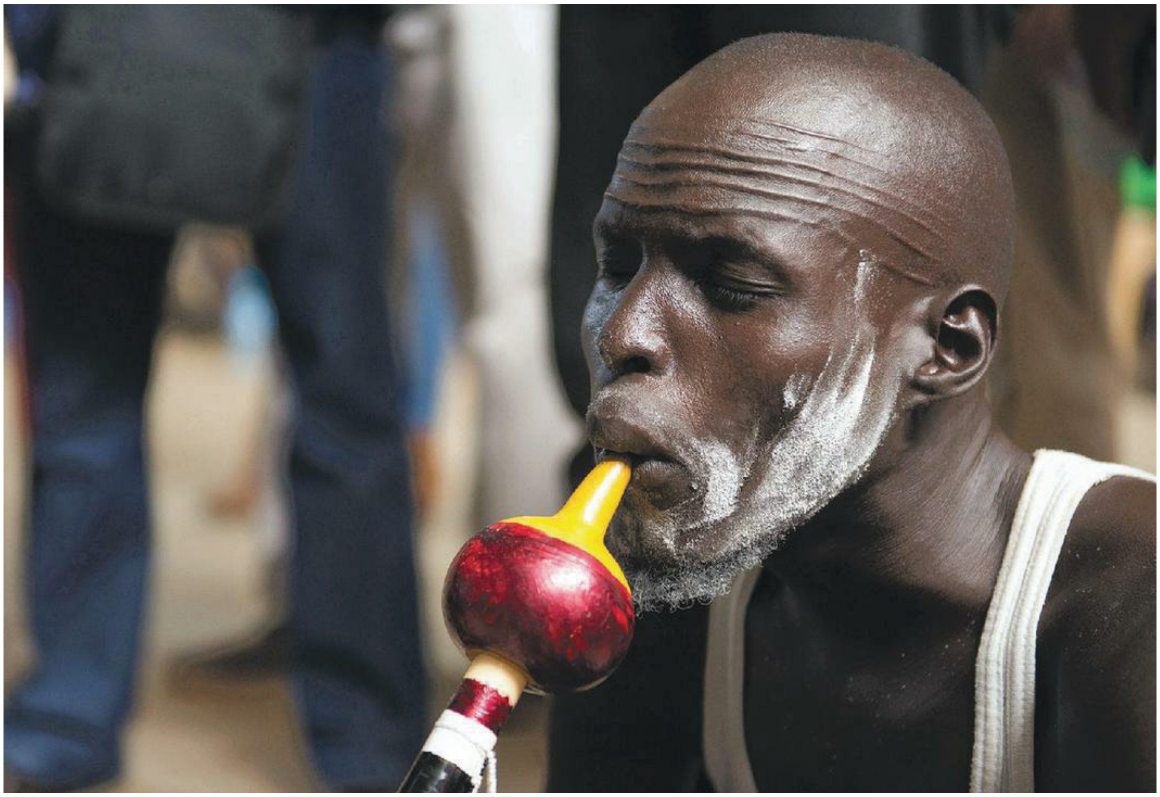


Figure 10.4 A Nuer man, his forehead showing traditional scarification, smokes a pipe at a UN camp for internally displaced people in South Sudan.

CHARLES LOMODONG/AFP via Getty Images

Gender Relations in Patrilineal Societies

The degree to which women are incorporated into the patrilineage of their husbands and the degree of autonomy they have vary in different societies. In some cases, women may retain rights of inheritance in their father's lineage. However, in most patrilineal systems, husbands have extensive control over their wives and children. This is partially explained by the fact that the continuity of the descent group depends on these individuals. Patrilineal systems most often have **patrilocal** rules of residence: Wives live with their husbands' families. Thus, women are separated from their families of origin. This often places them in positions of weakness in their new families, where they may have few who know or support them.

Anthropologists have had a longstanding interest in understanding the complexity and conflict present within patrilineal families and in understanding women's roles in kin groups dominated by men. Lila Abu-Lughod's (1993) analysis of families in the Arab world is a good example. Many analyses of Arab families have focused on male domination of women and issues of honor and shame, with honor revolving around men's ability to control the sexuality of women in their families. But, like the description of inheritance in Pine Tree village, Abu-Lughod's ethnography reveals that rules and principles are not always followed. Life everywhere is lived with conflicts, doubts, ambiguities, and arguments. Abu-Lughod challenged the notion of the Arab woman dominated and controlled by a patriarchal system by analyzing the stories Bedouin women tell about themselves: women who refuse their family's choice of a spouse, women who get along (or don't) with their co-wives, women who are sometimes disappointed in their sons, women who assert themselves against their husband's wishes—in short, women who rebel against the norms of their society in small and sometimes effective ways.

Social institutions, economies, and cultural ideologies are closely intertwined. There are no cultures in which people always behave as the rules tell them to behave. However, as economic systems change, people's behavior tends to depart more frequently from the rules. When there is rapid economic change, as in Korea, exceptions to the rules become more and more common. Under pressure, the rules of kinship may themselves change, but they do so far more slowly than behavior.

MATRILINEAL DESCENT

Ethnography

The Matrilineal Minangkabau of Sumatra

Indonesia and the location of the Minangkabau.

The Minangkabau, a rice-growing society in West Sumatra, Indonesia, is one of the few matrilineal Islamic societies in South Asia. In Minangkabau villages, kinship relations and families are organized around mothers and their daughters and sons. Anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood (2000) has worked among the Minangkabau since the late 1980s, and her work gives us insight into Minangkabau culture. Minangkabau women wield both formal and informal power in their families and their matrilineages. They own rice land and participate in decisions regarding life-cycle ceremonies. After marriage, residence is matrilocal, so daughters' husbands move into their wives' houses. Inheritance is matrilineal, so most land and property are transmitted from mothers to daughters.

The *big house*, or *matrihouse*, is a central site of Minangkabau social relations and usually contains an extended family of three or four generations, including a senior woman, her daughters, their husbands, and their children (Figure 10.5). There are rooms at the back and along one side of the big house for the mother and her daughters. This side ends with a kitchen. Much of the rest of the house is open space for public gatherings and ceremonies. Each house has a central post located near one end that is identified with the senior woman, who is called “the central pillar of the big house.”

Figure 10.5 Among the Minangkabau, matrilineages own houses composed of many rooms. The house has a central pillar that is identified with the most senior woman. This house, located outside Bukittinggi, Indonesia, is more than 100 years old.

Leisa Tyler/LightRocket via Getty Images

When a daughter marries, she and her husband move into her mother’s big house. Each newly married daughter resides with her husband in the room farthest from the central house post. As younger daughters are married, their elder married sisters move down the line of rooms toward the central post. The oldest woman sleeps in the room next to the kitchen and central post (Ng, 2006). Sons leave the house at marriage to move in with their wives, but one room next to the kitchen is designated as the men’s room for any divorced or widowed men forced to return home.

Women dominate the house. Because sons marry out, they are not part of the daily life of the house, and even senior men take center stage only temporarily when they preside over ceremonies. The conjugal unit of husband and wife is a subsidiary unit within the matrilineal extended family, and husbands are peripheral to household affairs. They are most often away during the day working and return to “visit” from dusk until dawn only. The weak ties between wives and husbands are captured by the Minangkabau saying that husbands are “like ash on a tree trunk, even a soft wind and they will fly away" (Peletz, 1996, p. 335). Husbands work primarily on the land of their mother's family but are also expected to work on their wife's family's land. They participate in decision-making in their mothers' but not in their wives' families. Men often have their own source of income through agricultural or wage labor. They use the money they earn to support both their wives' and mothers' families. If they buy land or houses, they may dispose of them as they wish. They often give them to their sons, but even these tend to become part of their sons' mothers' matrilineages over time (Kato, 1978).

The composition of a matrihouse varies: It may contain a several-generation extended family or be a two-generation household of adult women (that is, a mother and recently married daughters). Mother–daughter relations are the key to the composition of a matrihouse. Matrihouses endure from generation to generation as daughters are born, marry, bear children, and eventually become senior women themselves. When there are many daughters, those who cannot be accommodated within the matrihouse and their descendants may establish their own houses, often close by. Thus, over generations, matrihouses may develop into clusters of houses of related kinswomen.

Matrilineal inheritance of property is key to female power in the household. Generally, in societies in which property is inherited matrilineally, most property passes from mother to daughters. Mothers give land to their daughters after the daughters marry, and each daughter receives an equal share of land (Chadwick, 1991). Daughters decide how to use this land and what to do with its production. Sons may be given usage rights to land if the land is available and their mothers are willing to help them out, but they cannot pass matrilineal land on to their children.

The members of a matrihouse share resources in complex ways, guided by the high value the Minangkabau place on cooperation and assistance among kin as well as on their belief that those who earn an income have some rights over how to dispose of it. A family’s main income comes from the rice land belonging to the matrihouse and is used to pay for common household needs. In some matrihouses, mother and daughters share the produce of their undivided rice fields. Women may also have access to their own income, either from their husbands, through their own labor, or from small-scale businesses, and they may use some of this income for joint projects benefiting the matrihouse.

The senior woman manages the household, and all matrihouse members are expected to contribute some form of unpaid labor or cash to the household. Boys and girls watch younger siblings, girls help their mothers clean the house, and boys tend to small animals. Unmarried daughters weed the rice fields; adult daughters plant, weed, and harvest rice on the family land. Unmarried sons help with the harvest and transport unhusked rice to be milled. As senior women become elderly, the management of the household falls more to their daughters, as do the work and supervision of the rice fields.

Although married sons are not present in the daily life of the matrihouse, they remain kinsmen and have responsibilities and obligations that are contingent on their age and rank. Sons maintain a strong interest in and support for their natal kin group, and a son’s cooperation with his mother helps ensure her continued support of his interests. A mother displeased with her son may take back some rice land she has given him or refuse him the right to return to the house after a divorce. Apart from practical considerations, a man feels emotionally tied to his mother. Young unmarried Minangkabau men who work for wages in other parts of Indonesia usually send home some of their wages to their mothers. These filial obligations last throughout a man’s lifetime. Even after marriage, a son remains part of the matrilineal family with a voice in family matters and even substantial influence if he has proven a reliable helper to the matrihouse.

The duty to provide material assistance to both his own matrilineage and his wife’s family creates tensions for men. Mothers and sisters feel they have a right to make claims to a man’s income, but so do their wives, and there are no set rules for dividing income between these contenders. Men also maintain enduring ties with their children, even after divorce or remarriage. This, too, may cause tension as men are pulled between leaving their assets to their children or their sisters’ children.

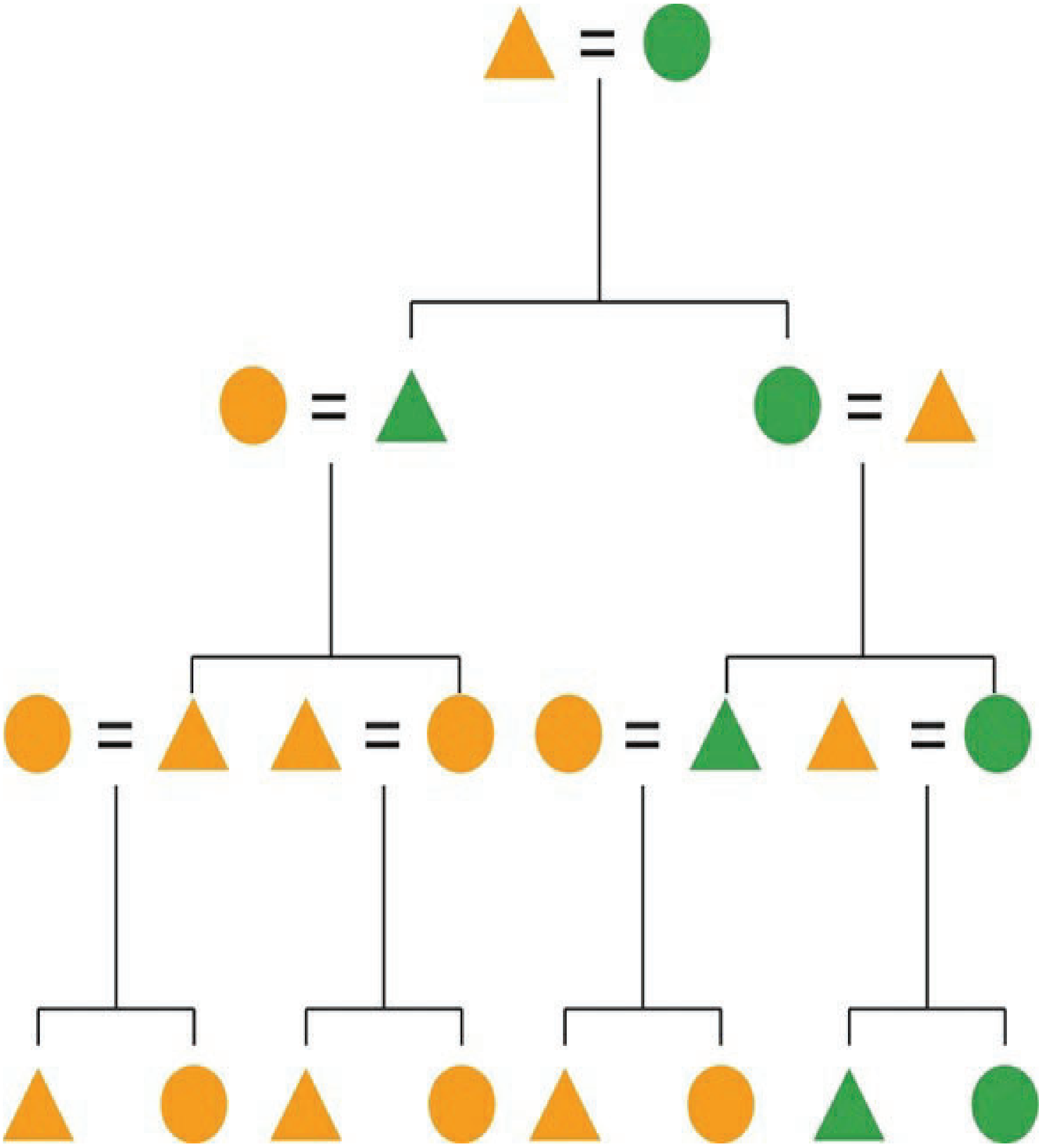
The matrilineal orientation of the Minangkabau conflicts with the patrilineal and patriarchal orientation of other Indonesian ethnic groups, and during Indonesia’s colonial era, it conflicted with the ideas of the Dutch colonialists. In the 19th century, colonizers attempted to put land in men’s hands, consistent with Western ideals. Indonesia gained independence in 1949, but Indonesian governments have remained largely hostile to traditional land rights (Lindsey, 1998). In most places in Indonesia, men are heads of households and women are dependent caretakers of home and family. This is further reinforced by Islam, and almost 90% of Indonesians, including most Minangkabau, are Muslims. Islam has specific rules for inheritance that conflict with Minangkabau ways. Although the Minangkabau do not follow these rules, there is always pressure to conform. Participation in the capitalist global economy may also favor men and support the movement from female to male dominance in families. Despite these influences, however, a matrilineal ideology and its associated practices continue to hold a predominant place in Minangkabau life.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What are the sources of women’s power among the Minangkabau?
2. What are the most important male and female roles in Minangkabau society?
3. Compare the sources of conflict in a matrilineal society like

the Minangkabau with those in a patrilineal society.

Two fundamental ties recognized by every society are the ties between mothers and their children and the ties between siblings. Ties between fathers and their offspring are more ambiguous. In patrilineal societies, the most important source of male authority and control is the man’s position as father and husband. In matrilineal societies, the male position of control and authority is not the father but rather the mother’s brother. In a matrilineal system, men gain sexual and economic rights to their wives but do not gain rights over their wives’ children. Children belong to their mother’s descent group, not their father’s, and many rights and responsibilities belong to their mother’s brother (Figure 10.6). The membership of a matrilineal descent group consists of women, their brothers and sisters, their children, the children of their sisters (but not the children of their brothers), and the children of their daughters (but not the children of their sons).



Description

Figure 10.6 A matrilineal descent group. In a society with matrilineal descent groups, membership in the group is defined by links through the mother (shown here in

green). Sons and daughters are members of their mother’s descent group, as are the children of daughters, but not the children of sons or those related by marriage (shown in yellow).

Matrilineal systems of descent tend to have **matrilocal** rules of residence: A husband goes to live with or near his wife’s kin after marriage. This means the husband is among strangers, whereas his wife is surrounded by her kin. The husband plays a far less important role in the household in a matrilineal system than in a patrilineal one, and marriages in matrilineal societies tend to be less stable than those in other systems. In some cases, as among the Nayar of India, described in a classic ethnography (Gough, 1961), or the Na of China, described in the reading assignment in the next chapter, it is possible for a matrilineally organized group to do away with the presence of husbands and fathers altogether.

Gender Relations in Matrilineal Societies

It is important to remember that although women usually have higher status in societies in which kinship is through descent through the mother’s line, matrilineality is not the same as matriarchy, nor is patrilineality the same as patriarchy. The words *patriarchy* and *matriarchy* describe systems of power and control. The words *patrilineal* and *matrilineal* describe systems of kinship and descent. Patrilineal societies are sometimes patriarchal as well. That is, men occupy most positions of power. In strongly patriarchal societies such as the Shia Islamic tribes of southern Iraq, Pashtun society in Afghanistan, and many others, men hold almost all positions of power and authority. Women’s activities, dress, and, above all, who they may associate with are tightly controlled by men. As the **reading assignment** shows, in matrilineal societies, women are very likely to hold significant political power and may occupy recognized positions of authority. However, there is no society in which women hold the kinds of controlling power over men that men hold over women in strongly patriarchal societies.

With a few possible exceptions (see A. Wallace, 1970), the most important resources and highest political positions in matrilineal societies are in the control of males. The critical difference is that the fathers do not hold power over women but rather brothers and uncles do. The role of the mother's brother is critical in most matrilineal societies. In a family, a mother's eldest brother is a figure of authority and respect. His heirs and successors are his sister's children rather than his own. One result is that the relationship between men and their sons is likely to be affectionate and loving because it is free of the problems of authority and control that exist between fathers and sons in a patrilineal society. Men may feel emotionally close to their sons, but they pass on their knowledge, property, and offices to their sisters' sons. And the sisters' sons are subject to their maternal uncles' control. Because of this, relations between maternal uncles and their sisters' sons may be more formal relations and more inclined to conflicts than relations between fathers and sons. Relations between mothers and daughters in matrilineal societies tend to be particularly close (Figure 10.7).

Figure 10.7 Matrilineal societies, such as the Navajo, emphasize consanguineal relationships in the female line. Mother-daughter bonds are extremely close. Here, Leanne Anthony-Portalita fixes her daughter Dina Anthony's headband before a dance at the Denver March Powwow in 2017.

Joe Amon/The Denver Post via Getty Images

In all societies, both men and women have loyalties to their families of birth and the families that are created by marriage. Sometimes, these loyalties will conflict. However, the fact that men may be emotionally close to their sons but are more responsible for their sisters' sons makes this split particularly pronounced in matrilineal societies. In patrilineal systems, women may be close to their brothers' daughters (the reciprocal of men's responsibility for sisters' sons) but rarely carry any special responsibility for them.

OTHER SYSTEMS OF DESCENT

Most readers will be familiar with bilateral descent since this is the system common in the United States and many other wealthy nations. In a bilateral descent system, an individual is considered to be related equally to both their mother's and father's families. Both maternal and paternal lines are used in reckoning descent—in establishing the rights and obligations of kinship. The people linked by bilateral kin networks are called a **kindred**. A kindred is not a corporate group. It does not own land or other resources. Rather, it is a network of relations. Except for brothers and sisters, in a bilateral system, every individual's kindred is different from that of every other individual. For example, your set of relations is different from your cousin's set of relations or the relations of your step-sibling or half-sibling.

Because they are focused around siblings and parents but provide connections to large numbers of different kinds of relations, bilateral kinship systems appear to be particularly adaptive in societies in which mobility and independence are important. They are basic to most current-day industrial and postindustrial societies, and they predominate among foraging societies as well.

In addition to unilineal and bilateral descent, there are systems that combine some characteristics of both. In an **ambilineal descent** system, individuals choose to affiliate with either their mother's or their father's descent group but not simultaneously with both. Ambilineal descent is found in many Pacific Island societies. In these societies, when a couple is married, they can choose to live with and identify with either spouse's descent group. Which descent group a couple chooses depends on a variety of factors. The most important of these is access to land, which is a resource in particularly short supply on many Pacific Islands and might be available only through either the father's or mother's family. However, friendships and politics also play important roles in the choice.

When descent is traced through a specific combination of matrilineal and patrilineal principles, the system is referred to as **double descent**. Double descent systems occur in only 5% of the world's cultures. In these societies, a person belongs both to the patrilineal group of the father and to the matrilineal group of the mother, but these descent groups operate in different areas of life.

The Yako of Nigeria have a system of double descent (Forde, 1950). Cooperation in daily domestic life is strongest among patrilineally related kinsmen, who live near one another and who jointly control and farm plots of land. Membership in the patrilineage is the source of rights over farmland and forest products. Membership in the men's associations and the right to fruit trees are also inherited through the male line. The arbitration of disputes is in the hands of senior members of the patrilineage.

Matrilineal bonds and clan membership are also important in Yako society, even though matrilineage members do not live near one another and do not cooperate as a group in everyday activities. Rights in the transfer of accumulated wealth such as currency and livestock, but not land, belong to the matrilineal kinship group. Women's movable property passes to their daughters. Matrilineages are responsible for the debts of their kin, for making loans to one another at reasonable rates, and for providing part of the bridewealth transferred at the marriage of a sister's son. The members of the matrilineage supervise funerals and arrange for the disposal of the personal property of the dead. Additionally, there are specific religious offices held by matrilineage members.

Thus, for the Yako, paternity and maternity play important complementary roles. Everyone inherits different nonoverlapping rights, obligations, and benefits through maternal and paternal lines.

Similar rules are present among the Himba, livestock herding people who live in northern Namibia and southern Angola (Figure 10.8). Among the Himba, people belong to both their father's and their mother's lineages but for access to different things. Matrilineal wealth consists mostly of cattle. These pass from a man, to his younger brothers, then to his oldest sister's oldest son. However, access to the land and water rights necessary to support the cattle are held in patrilineages and pass from fathers to sons. Most political offices are also the property of patrilineages (Scelza et al., 2019).

Figure 10.8 Among the Himba a herding group of Southeast Africa, people belong to both their father's and their mother's lineages but for access to different things.

iStockphoto.com/Astalor

CLASSIFYING KIN

In all societies, kin are referred to by special terms. Every society has a system of **kinship terminology**: words used to identify different categories of kin. In our society, *brother, mother, uncle*, and *cousin* are examples of such terms. In a kinship system, some relatives are differentiated from each other (called by different terms), and some are classed together (called by the same kinship term). For example, our words for our siblings, *brother* and *sister*, differentiate by sex, but we have no words to differentiate male from female cousins. We simply use *cousin* for both. Kinship systems vary in the degree to which they have different kinship terms for different relatives. Some kinship systems have only a small number of kinship terms, but others have a different term for almost every relative.

The ways that kin are classified are associated with the roles they play in society. If a person refers to their father and their father's brothers by the same term, the social roles the father and father's brother play with respect to that person will tend to be similar. By the same token, if they use one term to refer to their father and another to refer to their father's brothers, there will probably be a difference in behavior as well. For example, in U.S. society, a mother-in-law (a spouse's mother) and a mother's brother's wife (an aunt) are both relations by marriage. However, only one of them is distinguished terminologically. Mother-in-law is always distinguished from mother. Your aunt is your aunt, whether she is your mother's sister or your mother's brother's wife. Given this, an anthropologist would expect that your behavior toward your mother would be different than toward your mother-in-law but that you would behave the same toward your mother’s sister and your mother’s brother’s wife. Of course, although kinship terms correspond with behavioral expectations, actual behavior is modified by individual personality differences and special circumstances.

Understanding kinship classification systems is not just an interesting anthropological game. Kinship classification is one of the important regulators of behavior in most societies, outlining each person’s rights and obligations and specifying how people should act toward each other. Kinship classification systems are also related to other aspects of culture: the types of social groups that are formed, the systems of marriage and inheritance, and even deeper and broader cultural values.

Principles of Kin Classification

Kinship can be described using a series of principles. The combination of these results in kinship systems that are extremely logical yet very different from our own. Societies differ in the categories of relatives they distinguish and the principles by which kin are classified.

To understand the rules for using kin terms in any society, we must first establish the position of the individual from whose perspective the system is seen. We refer to this person as “Ego.” You are Ego when you describe your family. You may say something like, “I have three siblings, two aunts, and two uncles on my mother’s side.” If you were to do the same thing from your cousin’s perspective, then they would be Ego. Once we have established Ego, we can use the following seven principles to examine how different categories of kin are grouped and distinguished.

Generation. The generation principle distinguishes ascending and descending generations from Ego. In U.S. society, you, your brothers and sisters, and the children of your parents’ brothers and sisters are members of the same generation. Your parents and their brothers and sisters and the spouses of those brothers and sisters are members of the ascending generation. Your children, as well as those of your siblings and cousins, are members of the descending generation. It is important to understand that generation is different from age. It is not unusual for some members of your parents' generation to be the same age as some members of your generation, or even younger.

Relative Age. A kinship system that uses the relative age principle has different kinship terms for family members that are older than Ego and family members that are younger than Ego. The requirement that Nanda distinguishes between her husband's older brother (her *jait*) and her husband's younger brother (her *deva*) is an example of this. Most U.S. kinship terminology does not use this principle.

Lineality Versus Collaterality. Kin related in a single unbroken line, such as grandfather–father–son, are called **lineal kin**. **Collateral kin** are the siblings of these people and their descendants. In U.S. society, this includes brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins as well as many other categories. In many societies, lineal relations are not always distinguished from collateral relations. For example, a biological father or mother is a lineal relation to Ego. Father's brothers or mother's sisters are collateral relations. In some kinship systems, Ego may refer to both his father and his father's brother as *father*. Both his mother and her sisters may similarly be called *mother*. Thus, lineal and collateral kin may be merged.

Gender. Kinship systems that use the principle of gender have different kin terms for people of different genders. In U.S. kinship, some kinship terms differentiate by gender, such as *aunt, uncle*, and *brother*; the term *cousin*, however, does not differentiate by gender. In some other cultures, all kinship terms distinguish gender.

Consanguineal Versus Affinal Kin. People related to Ego by descent (consanguinity) are distinguished from those related by marriage (**affinal kin**). For example, the U.S. kinship terminology distinguishes *sister* from *sister-in-law, father* from *father-in-law*, and so on. The English word *uncle*, however, does not distinguish between **consanguineal** and affinal relationships; it is applied equally to the brother of one's father or mother, who is a consanguineal relative, and to the husband of a mother's or father's sister, who is a relation by marriage.

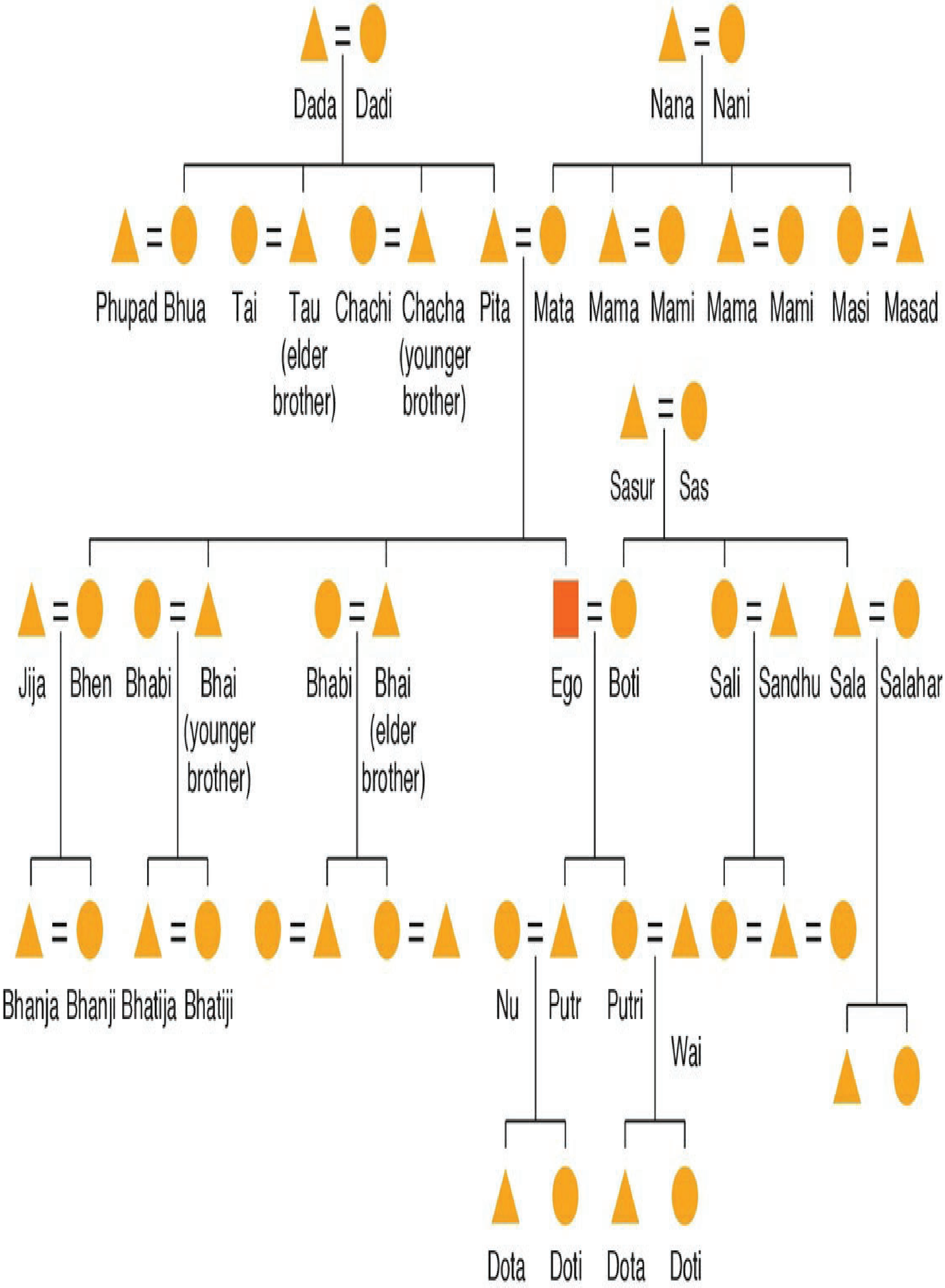
Side of the Family. Some societies use a kinship system in which kin terms distinguish between relatives from the mother's side of the family and those from the father's side. This principle is called **bifurcation**. As we saw previously, this principle is used in North Indian society but not usually in our own.

Sex of Linking Relative. In societies that distinguish lineal from collateral relatives, the sex of the linking relative may also be important. A linking relative is an individual related to you consanguineously who connects you to another relative. For example, if your mother's sister has children, you are linked to those children through your mother's sister. If your mother's brother has children, you are linked to those children through your mother's brother. When the sex of your parent and the linking relative is the same (mother's sister or father's brother), the children to whom you are linked are known as **parallel cousins**. If the sex of your parent and the linking relative is different (mother's brother or father's sister), the children to whom you are linked are known as your **cross-cousins**. In many societies (though not for most Americans), people use different kin terms for parallel and cross-cousins. These cousins are often further distinguished by whether the linking relative is from the mother's or father's side of the family. This is particularly important in societies where Ego is prohibited from marrying a parallel cousin but may—or even must—marry a cross-cousin.

Comparing Kin Classification in North India and the United States

Nanda (one of the authors of this text) is an American woman married to a North Indian man. After her marriage, her husband's family instructed her on how to behave with various relatives. Her relationship with her husband's brothers and their wives is regulated by the principle of seniority. Her husband's elder brother is her *jait*, and his wife is her *jaitani*. She must treat both of them with special respect and courtesy, similar to that shown to her father-in-law. She adds the suffix -*ji* to their kinship terms, touches their feet when she meets them, and doesn't use their first names. But her husband's younger brother, who is her *deva*, and his wife, who is her *devrani*, may be treated with the friendly informality more characteristic of sister and brother-in-law relations in the United States. On her trips to India, she can greet her husband's younger brother with an embrace and talk with him in a joking, familiar manner, but she must never embrace her husband's elder brother, even though she feels equally friendly toward him and likes him equally well. Notice that the difference in her behavior reflects the different terms for these relatives.

Northern Indians have many more kinship terms and distinguish many more kinds of relations than do most Americans. Americans generally distinguish about 22 different kinds of kin, but northern Indians distinguish 45. Thus, the North Indian system distinguishes several kinds of kin that North Americans group together. This reflects the greater flexibility in behavior toward kin that is acceptable in North America (Figure 10.9).


Dada
Dadi
Nana
Nani
Phupad
Bhua
Tai
Tau (elder brother)
Chachi
Chacha (younger brother)
Pita
Mata
Mama
Mami
Mama
Mami
Masi
Masad
Sasur
Sas
Jija
Bhen
Bhabi
Bhai (younger brother)
Bhabi
Bhai (elder brother)
Ego
Boti
Sali
Sandhu
Sala
Salahar
Bhanja
Bhanji
Bhatija
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Doti

Description

Figure 10.9 Kinship classification of North India: terms of reference from a male’s perspective. (Note: There is no term for a man’s nieces and nephews on his wife’s side. They are referred to descriptively as the wife’s sister’s daughters or sons.) Not shown on the diagram are the terms a wife uses for her husband’s sister, her husband’s sister’s husband, her husband’s elder brother, his wife, her husband’s younger brother, and his wife, which adds 6 terms to the 39 used by a male to describe his kin.

The North Indian kin system reflects two principles absent in the system most Americans use: relative age and differentiating the mother’s from the father’s family. These principles reflect the central importance of hierarchy and patrilineality in North Indian society (Figure 10.10).

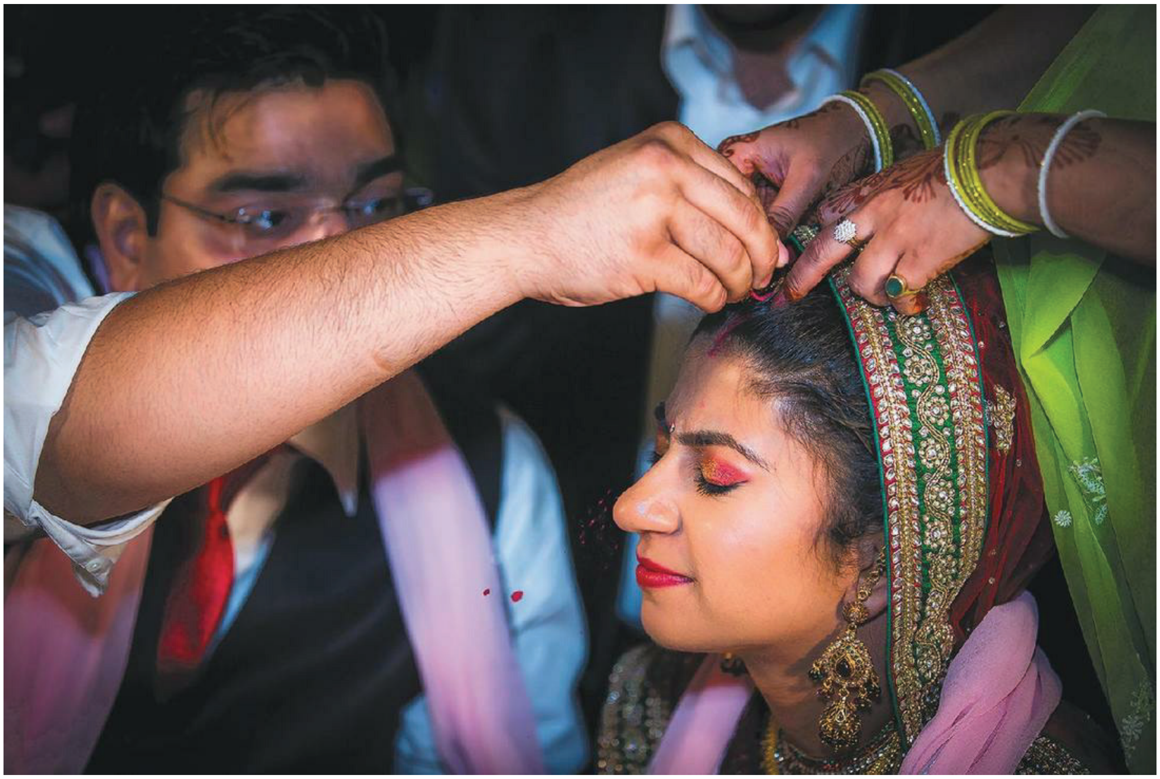


Figure 10.10 There are many rituals involved in an Indian wedding. Here a groom applies sindoor (vermillion) to the bride’s forehead. Sindoor is the mark of a married women and a respectable daughter-in-law. Wives apply it to themselves daily to mark the presence of their husbands in their lives. There is no similar mark for husbands.

Soumen Nath Photography/Getty Images

The principle of relative age, an aspect of hierarchy, is critical in North Indian kinship. A man uses different terms to refer to his father’s elder brothers (*tau*) and his father’s younger brothers (*chacha*), and this carries over to his father’s brothers’ wives; his father’s elder brothers’ wives are *tai* and his father’s younger brothers’ wives are *chachi*. This terminological difference reflects the respect attached to seniority. Out of respect for the principle of hierarchy, it is still common for many North Indian women to cover their hair, if not their faces, in the presence of both the father-in-law and the husband’s elder brother.

The principle of differentiating the mother’s side from the father’s side of the family is known as bifurcation and is absent in mainstream American kinship terminology. In North India, the father’s brothers and the mother’s brothers are called by different terms, as are the father’s and mother’s parents. These distinctions reflect the North Indian principle of respect and formality associated with the male side of the family and the more open show of affection permitted with the maternal side of the family.

The Indian principles of hierarchy and patrilineality feature again in the higher status accorded to the family of the husband’s relatives. Kinship terminology reflects this unequal status in many ways. For example, most Americans would call a man’s wife’s brother and a man’s sister’s husband by a single term: *brother-in-law*. In North India, the wife’s brother is *sala*, but a sister’s husband is *jija*. A *jija* is treated with great respect, whereas a wife’s brother may be treated more ambivalently and may be the target of jokes.

Kinship rules play a key role in structuring relationships in North India. However, their functions in guiding behavior, just like their functions in succession and inheritance, may be resisted and manipulated in response to pragmatic interest, social circumstances, and emotion. Contesting claims over family property may lead to alliances within the family that contrast with cultural rules about seniority and patriarchal power. Family crises such as illness also may direct the flow of resources in directions not delineated by and even in opposition to kinship.

As a close examination of kinship in any society reveals, our understanding of culture and society must be based not just on people's notions about ideal behavior but also on the real strategies people use to negotiate life's contingencies.

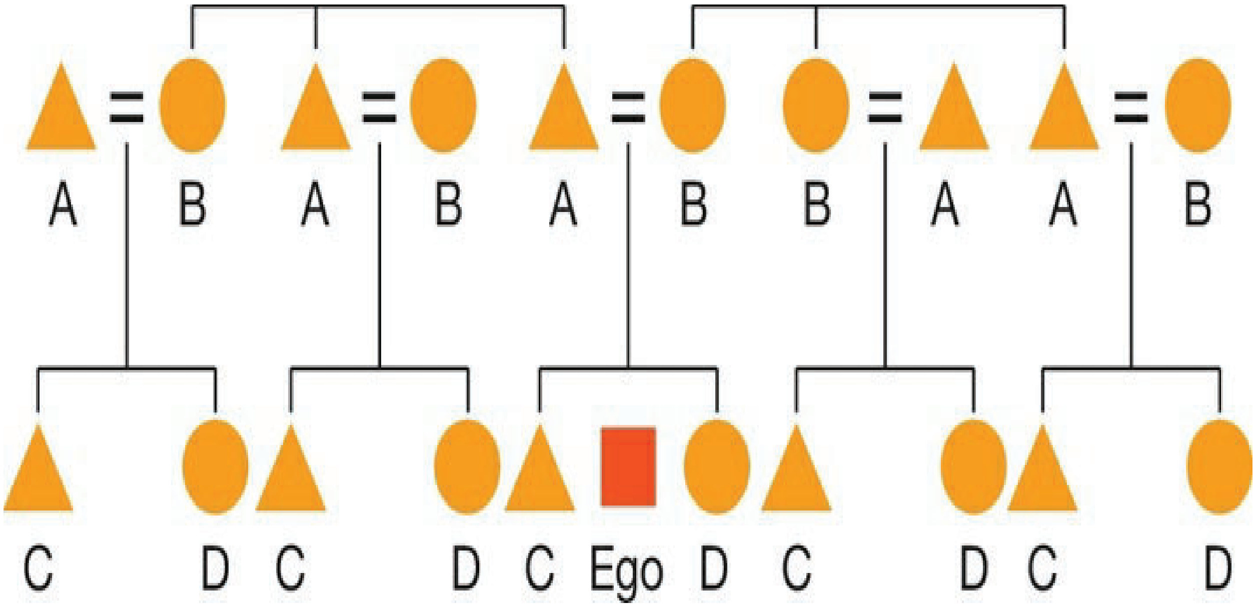
In addition to informing us about the behavior of people in other societies, the study of kinship systems relates to a fundamental point of anthropology. Most Americans consider it normal and natural to use our kin system. We "naturally" call our parents' brothers and sisters *aunt* and *uncle* and their children *cousins*. We feel that this represents an obvious underlying biological reality and find it hard to understand how other people could use different systems. We tend to ignore questions our system raises, such as why we use the same word for our mother's sister and our mother's brother's wife, or why we don't use separate terms for male and female cousins but we do differentiate nieces from nephews. These discrepancies point to a basic fact: Kinship systems use terms that seem to be based on biology, but they are social systems, not biological ones. The systems other societies use feel as natural to their members as ours does to us.

Kinship Systems

The principles of kinship classification combine to form six different systems of kinship. Lewis Henry Morgan first described these systems in the 19th century. With one exception, he gave them the names of Native American and Pacific Island groups: Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese. In some cases, these names reflect 19th-century terminology. Since most people who outsiders referred to as Eskimo prefer the term Inuit, we will talk about the Inuit rather than the Eskimo kinship system. Readers who wish to do further research on this topic should be aware that both terms refer to the same kinship system. Although the groups that Morgan identified do use the kin terminology he associated with them, Morgan hoped to create a system to classify all the world's peoples. So, for example, the Iroquois use the Iroquois kin system, but so do the Yanomamö, a South American group; some villages in rural China; and many other groups around the world.

Systems of kinship terminology reflect the kinds of kin groups that are most important in a society. Each of these systems is described briefly. You will find that careful attention to the accompanying diagrams will help you understand the descriptions:

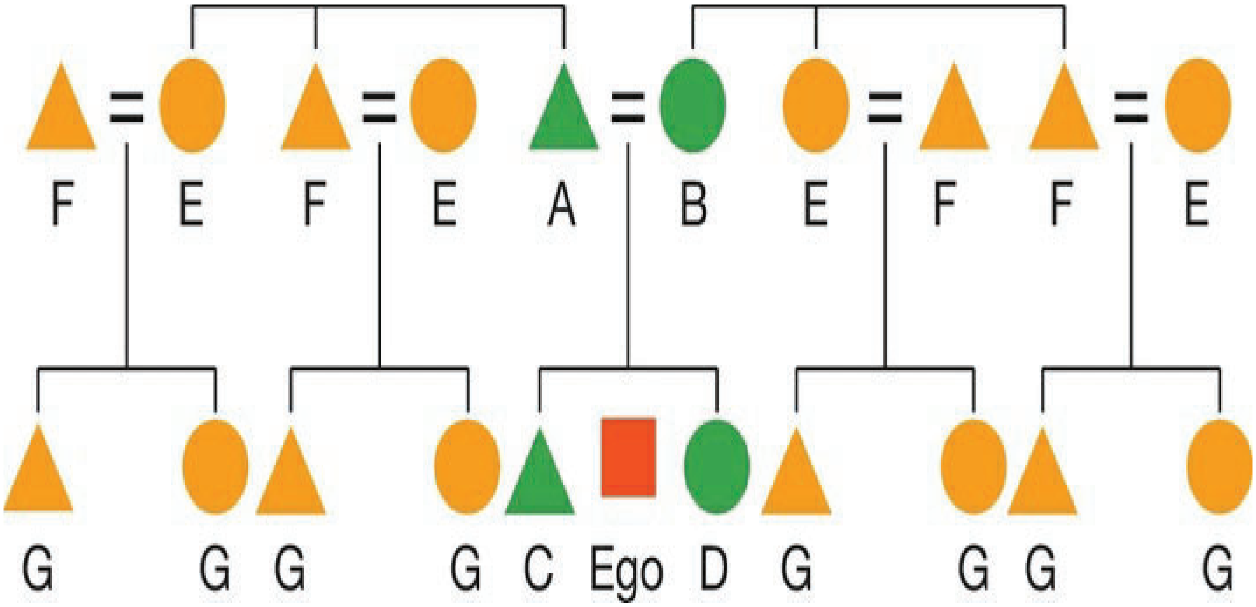
Hawaiian. As its name suggests, the Hawaiian system is found in Polynesia. It uses the fewest kinship terms of any of the systems. The Hawaiian system emphasizes the distinctions between generations and reflects the equality between the mother's and the father's sides of the family. All relatives of the same generation and sex—for example, father, father's brother, and mother's brother—are referred to by the same kinship term. Male and female kin in Ego's generation are distinguished terminologically, but the terms for sister and brother are the same as those for the children of one's parents' siblings (Figure 10.11). This system correlates with ambilineality and ambilocality, which means that depending on circumstances and choice, a person may belong to and live with either their mother's or father's descent group. Using the same terms for parents and their siblings establishes closeness with many relatives in the ascending generation, giving Ego a wide choice in deciding which group to affiliate and live with.



Description

Figure 10.11 Hawaiian kinship. The primary distinctions in Hawaiian kinship are between men and women and between generations. All members of Ego’s generation are designated by the same terms Ego uses for brother and sister. All members of Ego’s parents’ generation are designated by the same terms Ego uses for mother and father.

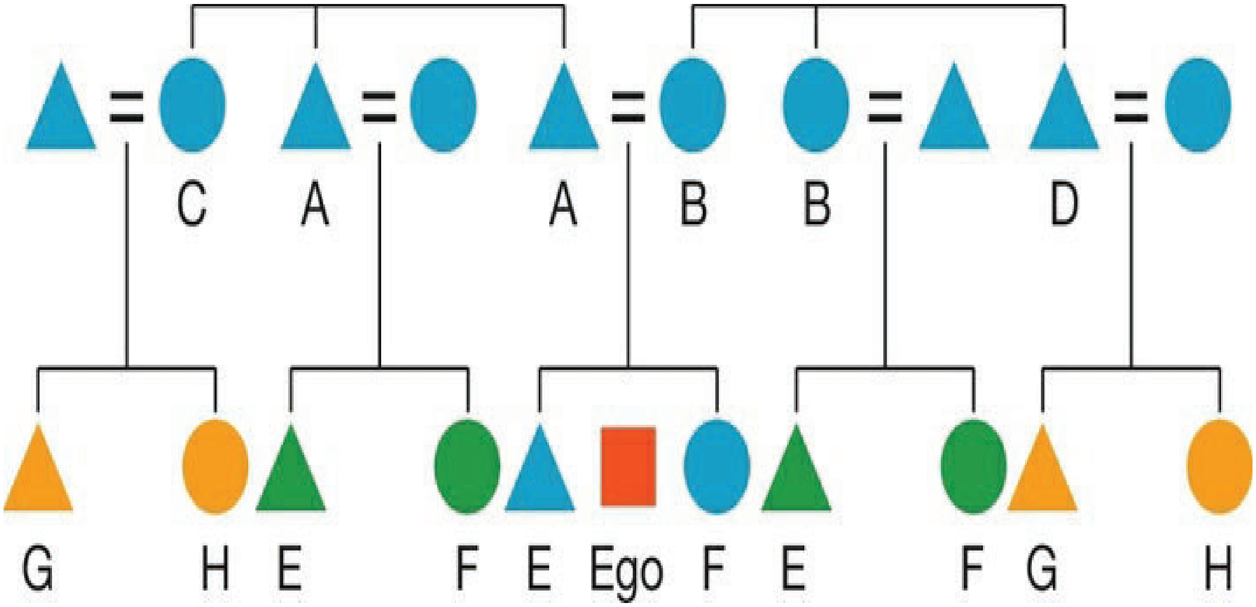
Inuit. Inuit terminology, found among hunting-and-gathering peoples in North America and in many current industrial and postindustrial societies, is correlated with bilateral descent. The Inuit system singles out the nuclear family and treats more distant kin more or less equally. It uses specialized terms for nuclear family members (*mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son*). Outside the nuclear family, many kinds of relatives that are distinguished in other systems are lumped together (Figure 10.12). You will recognize the Inuit kinship system as the one that is most common in the United States.



Description

Figure 10.12 Inuit kinship. A critical distinction in Inuit kinship is between lineal and collateral relations. Ego uses one set of terms to refer to lineal relations (A, B, C, and D) and a second set to refer to collateral relations (E, F, and G).

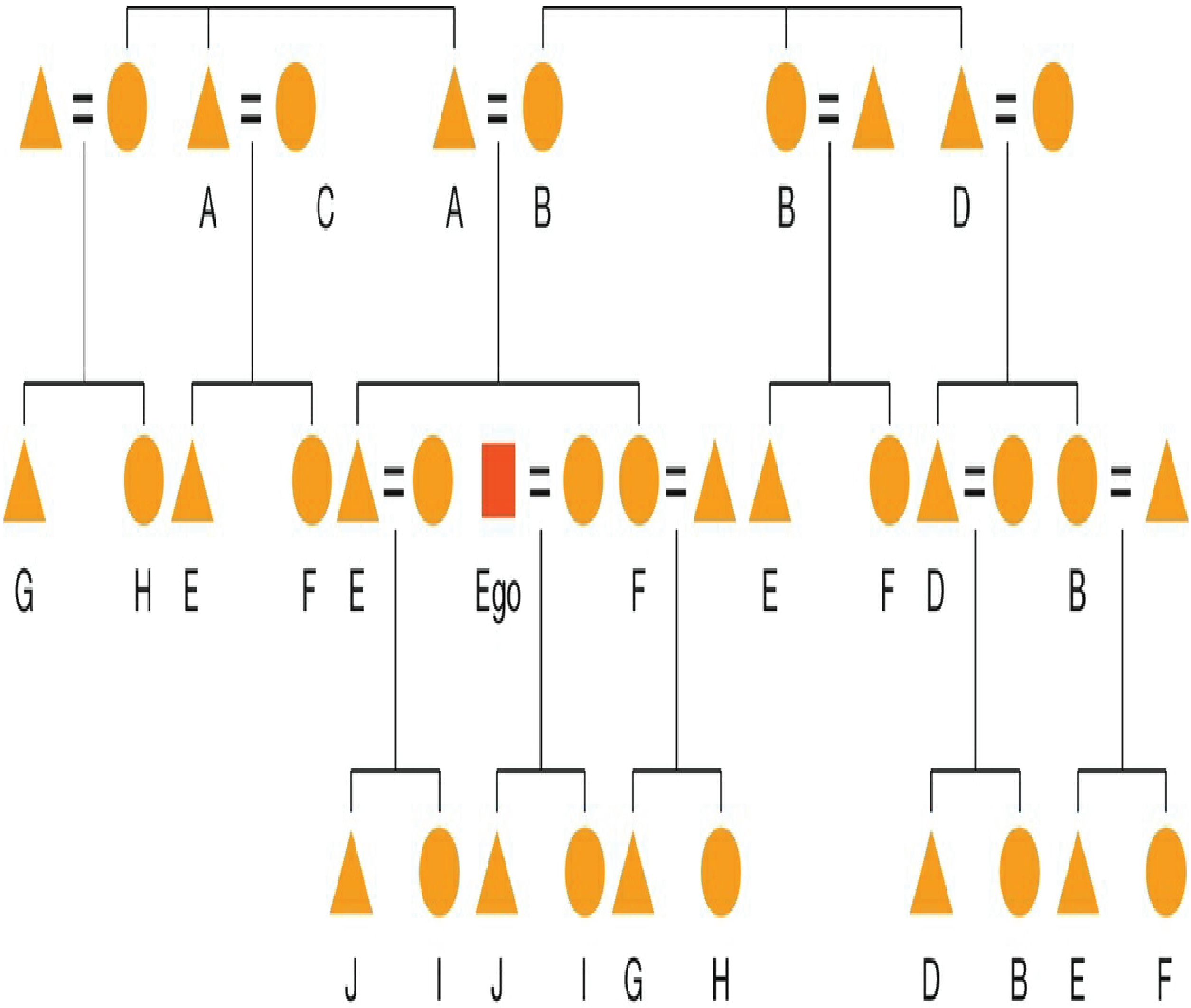
Iroquois. The Iroquois system is associated with both patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems. It emphasizes the importance of unilineal descent groups, separating relatives through the mother's line from those through the father's. In this system, the same term is used for mother and mother's sister, and a common term also applies to father and father's brother. Parallel cousins are referred to by the same terms as those for brother and sister. Father's sister and mother's brother are distinguished from other kin, as are the children of the father's sister and mother's brother (Ego's cross-cousins) (Figure 10.13).



[Description](#)

Figure 10.13 Iroquois kinship. The Iroquois system is found in societies with unilineal descent. It distinguishes the mother's side of the family (B and D) from the father's side of the family (A and C) and cross-cousins (in orange) from parallel cousins (in yellow).

Omaha. The Omaha system is found among patrilineal peoples, including the Native Americans whose name it bears. In this system, the same term is used for father and father's brother and for mother and mother's sister. Parallel cousins are equated with siblings, but cross-cousins are referred to by separate terms. A man refers to his brother's children by the same terms he applies to his own children, but he refers to his sister's children by different terms. These terms are extended to all relations who are classified as Ego's brothers and sisters (Figure 10.14). In this system, there is a merging of generations on the mother's side. All men who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineage will be called *mother's brother* regardless of their age or generational relationship to Ego. Thus, the term applied to the mother's brother is also applied to the son of the mother's brother. The generational merging on the mother's side suggests that Ego stands in the same relationship with all of these people.



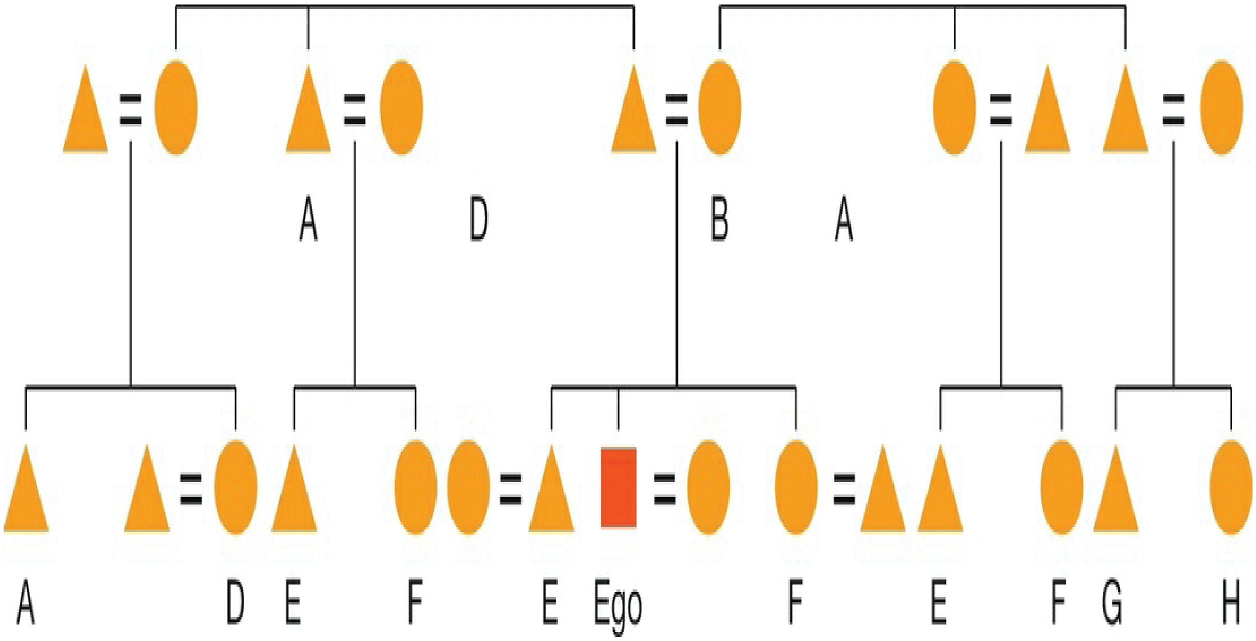
Description

Figure 10.14 Omaha kinship. The Omaha is a bifurcate merging system found among patrilineal people. Like the Iroquois system, it merges father and father's brother and mother and mother's sister. However, in addition, the Omaha system merges generation on the mother's side. So, men who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineage

are referred to by the same term as for mother’s brother, regardless of age or generation.

This generational merging is not applied to relations on the father’s side. Although the father and his brothers are referred to by the same term, this does not extend to the descending generation. The different terminology applied to the father’s and the mother’s patrilineal groups reflects the different position of Ego in relation to these kin. Generational differences are important on the father’s side because members of the ascending generation are likely to have some authority over Ego (as his father does) and be treated differently from patrilineage members of Ego’s own generation. The mother’s patrilineage is more distant from Ego in this system, and this is reflected by lumping them all together in the terminology.

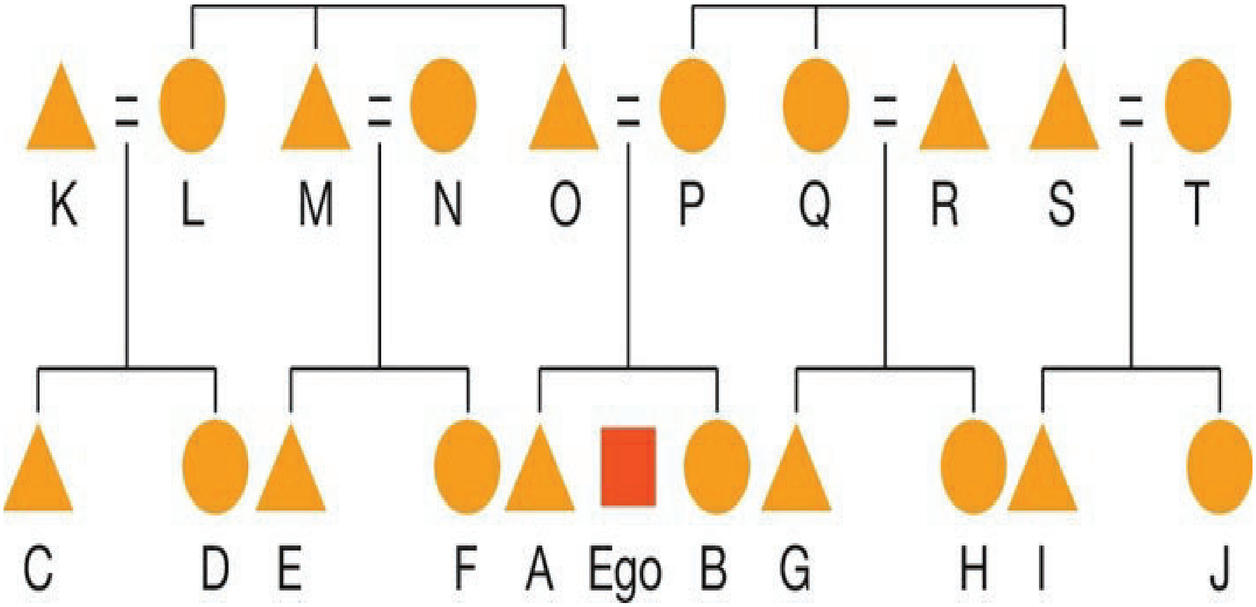
Crow. The Crow system, named for the Crow Indians of North America, is the matrilineal equivalent of the Omaha system. This means that the relations on the male side (Ego’s father’s matrilineage) are lumped together, whereas generational differences are recognized in the mother’s matrilineal group (Figure 10.15). This suggests that members of the mother’s lineage are in specific positions of responsibility, power, and authority with respect to Ego, whereas members of the father’s matrilineage are not. In both the Omaha and Crow systems, the overriding importance of lineality leads to the subordination of other principles of classifying kin, such as relative age or generation.



Description

Figure 10.15 Crow kinship. The Crow system is similar to the Omaha but is found among matrilineal people. Like the Omaha and Iroquois, it merges father with father's brother and mother with mother's sister. However, unlike the Omaha, it merges generation on the father's side so that all women who are members of the father's matrilineage are referred to with the term for father's sister, regardless of age or generation.

Sudanese. No North American groups used Morgan's final kinship system, so he named it Sudanese after the African groups (primarily in Ethiopia) who do use it. It is also used in some places in Turkey and was used in ancient Rome. Sudanese is the most descriptive terminology system and uses different terms for practically every relative: siblings, paternal parallel cousins, maternal parallel cousins, paternal cross-cousins, and maternal cross-cousins. Ego refers to their parents by terms distinct from those for father's brother, father's sister, mother's sister, and mother's brother (Figure 10.16). The groups using Sudanese kinship tend to be strongly patrilineal and very concerned with issues of wealth, class, and political power.



Description

Figure 10.16 Sudanese kinship. The Sudanese system occurs most frequently in societies with substantial hierarchy and distinction of class. It includes a separate term for each type of relative.

The great variety of kinship terminologies underscores the fact that kinship systems reflect social relationships and are not based simply on biological relations between people. Each type of classification emphasizes the most important kinship groupings and relationships in the societies that use it. Thus, the Inuit system emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family and sets the nuclear family apart from other relations. The Iroquois, Omaha, and Crow systems, found in unilineal societies, emphasize the importance of lineage and clan. In the Hawaiian system, the simplicity of terms leaves the way open for flexibility in choosing one’s descent group.

Anthropologists study kinship as one piece in understanding the different worlds of meaning as well as the ecological, economic, and political conditions under which families and societies exist. Kinship provides one framework for a wide range of studies, including new family forms such as domestic partnerships, new reproductive technologies, mobility within family genealogies, gender relations in both colonial and contemporary societies, and new constructions of blood relations. We take up some of these topics in the next chapter.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: KINSHIP AND IMMIGRATION, AND TRANSMIGRATION

Kinship relations are an important factor in the migration of people across state borders—a significant dimension of globalization. The importance of kinship in this process is apparent in the criteria by which immigration rights and citizenship are granted in most nations of the world. In the United States, the priority of kinship and the cultural importance of bilateral kin relations are basic to immigration policy. In 1965, 1978, and 1990, new immigration laws abolished the discriminatory national origins quota system of the 1920s and emphasized family reunification. The current preference system, which gives the highest priority to members of the nuclear family, indicates U.S. cultural priorities and reflects U.S. bilateral kinship: Preferences are given to spouses and biological children. A lower preference is given to brothers and sisters, their spouses, and their children.

Immigration policies that make it easier for kin to come to the United States as well as high levels of illegal immigration (often to join family members) have led to a large foreign-born population in the country. In 1970, less than 5% of the U.S. population was foreign born. By 1994, that number had risen to almost 9%, and by 2018, it had risen to 13.7% (Pew Research Center, 2020).

There are important differences between immigration today and immigration 100 years ago. In the past, most immigrants more or less severed ties with kin who stayed behind. Travel was difficult and expensive. The only way most kin could keep in contact was by letters. Immigrants today live in a world where communication by telephone, e-mail, and the Internet is abundant, relatively simple, and inexpensive. Air travel is within the reach of the middle and working classes. Thus, many immigrants, especially those from nearby areas such as the Caribbean, can retain much closer social and economic ties with their families and cultures in their homelands than was previously possible. This pattern of close ties and frequent visits by immigrants to their home countries is called **transnationalism**.

The term **transmigrant** refers to immigrants who maintain close relations with their home countries (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995). Transmigrants move culture, money, and information around the world rapidly, often through kin networks. The substantial amounts of money migrants send to their families back home are critical in the economies of many nations and, by extension, in the global economy. According to the World Bank, in 2021, immigrants around the world sent $589 billion home to low- and middle-income countries (Ratha, 2021). Globally, about one in nine people are supported by such remittances (UN, 2019). In some cases, remittances play a critical role in national budgets. For example, in Tonga, Lebanon, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nepal, remittances in 2021 were equivalent to more than a quarter of the nation’s total economic output (KNOMAD, 2021). Money sent home by migrants offers assistance for kin left behind both in their domestic lives and in the building of communities. However, it also leaves these relatives vulnerable to changes in the global economy.

Kinship ties have also long been an important route for social networking and earning a living in a new country. Among Chinese immigrants to the United States, for example, pooling resources with kin has been a critical factor in business success. More than 90% of new immigrant businesses in the San Francisco Bay Area are family firms, initiated and built on family resources and kinship networks. As these firms grow, the family may depend on fictive kinship, incorporating people from the same village or those with the same last name but no known relationship. Things are changing, however. The social networks of newer, successful Chinese immigrant professionals in the high-tech businesses of Silicon Valley have become more like those of other Americans. Kinship and village networks are giving way to professional organizations, nonrelated friends, political organizations, and transnational business partners (Wong, 2006, 2018).

Kinship networks continue to be important for many immigrant groups. However, the Chinese in Silicon Valley indicate that as immigrant situations change, the previous emphasis on kinship networks as a source of support may give way to or be balanced by other relationships.

Key Questions

1. What are some important connections between kinship and transmigration?
2. Discuss how your own kinship relations (or those of a recent immigrant or child of immigrants whom you know) function in both a global and a local context.

SUMMARY

1. What does *kinship system* refer to and why is it important? Kinship system refers to the relationships based on descent and marriage that link people in a web of rights and obligations, the groups formed in a society based on such rights and obligations, and the terms used to classify different kin. Kinship is one of the major ways societies are organized and plays an important role in our own society.
2. What are the functions of a kinship system? Kinship imparts continuity between generations, provides for the orderly transmission of property and social position between generations,

and defines a universe of others upon whom a person can depend for aid.

3. What is a descent group, and what is the difference between unilineal and bilateral descent? A descent group is a group of people who understand themselves as similar because they share ancestry. In societies with a unilineal descent, descent group membership is based on either the male or female line. In societies with bilateral descent, group membership is based on both male and female lines.
4. How are the contradictions between the prescriptions of kinship systems and the realities of life shown by Pine Tree Village, Korea? Kinship systems are social rules, but individual circumstances, personalities, and family history may modify them. In the Pine Tree Village example, Sungjo, the son of one individual, should have had rights to the land. However, the daughter of Sungjo's older brother, whose family had sacrificed to send Sungjo to school, refused to surrender the rights. The case pitted the obligation to follow the kin rules against the debt owed by Sungjo. This matter was not easily settled.
5. What is a lineage, and how does it relate to a descent group? A lineage is a group of kin whose members can trace their descent from a common ancestor. In unilineal systems of descent, lineage membership is based either on patrilineage, which is descent through the male line, or matrilineage, which is descent through the female line, but not both.
6. What are the central dynamics that characterize patrilineal kinship systems? In patrilineal systems, a man's children belong to his lineage, as do the children of his sons but not of his daughters; husbands have strong control over wives and children; and the common economic interests of brothers is a major feature of the society. Patrilineality is often associated with patrilocality.
7. How do the Nuer demonstrate both the dynamics of some kinds of patrilineality and the continuing relevance of anthropology? Politics for the Nuer operates through kinship. There is no central government. Rather, people are members of lineage, clan, and higher-level groups. This is called a segmentary lineage system. Such systems suppress disputes at the level of the family but

tend to expand them at higher levels. One of the sources of current-day violence in South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia is the segmentary lineage system. It will be impossible to find solutions to this violence without understanding kinship.

8. What are the central dynamics that characterize matrilineal kinship systems? In matrilineal systems, a woman's children belong to her lineage, not that of their father. The mother's brother has authority over his sister's children, and relations between husband and wife are more fragile than in patrilineal societies. Matrilineality is often associated with matrilocality.
9. How does Minangkabau matrilineal kinship illustrate female power in society? Women are the property owners in Minangkabau society. They are the "central pillars" of their houses and control family land, which is divided evenly among daughters as they marry. Minangkabau men live in the homes of their wives and contribute to these homes. However, their primary influence is on the families of their sisters.
10. What is double descent, and how does it function? In systems of double descent, the individual belongs to both the patrilineage of the father and the matrilineage of the mother. Each group functions in different social contexts. The Yako of Nigeria have a system of double descent.
11. What is bilateral descent, and what are its central characteristics? In bilateral systems, an individual is equally related to their mother's and father's kin. This results in the formation of overlapping kinship networks called kindreds. Kindreds connect large numbers of people with loose kin bonds. This highly flexible system is found predominantly among foragers and in industrial and postindustrial states.
12. What are some of the principles used to categorize relatives in different systems of kinship terminology? Kinship terminologies group together or distinguish relatives according to generation, relative age, lineality or collaterality, sex, consanguinity or affinity, bifurcation, and sex of the linking relative. Different societies may use all or some of these principles. For example, the U.S. kinship terminology does not distinguish relative age, nor does it distinguish the mother's from the father's side of the family, as is

done in North India.

13. What are the six major types of kinship classification systems, and what do such systems reveal about a society? The six major systems of kinship classification are the Hawaiian, Inuit, Iroquois, Omaha, Crow, and Sudanese. Because kinship is a principal organizing structure in many societies and because using different kin terms reflects different behaviors expected toward different types of relatives, understanding kin systems helps anthropologists understand important aspects of social organization and behavior in different societies.
14. What roles does kinship play in immigration and transmigration? Kin relationships have been critical in gaining access to immigration rights in many countries. Kin have also played key roles in helping immigrants successfully adapt to their new homes. But, as the social status of immigrants changes, the importance of kin might also change. For example, among Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area, kinship was historically very important, but among contemporary Chinese professionals, occupational organizations and other nonkin networks play increasingly large roles.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Anthropologists have long been interested in kinship, especially in societies without centralized government. Why should this be the case?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of social organization through unilineal or bilateral kinship? Are there particular circumstances in which societies organized by one might have an advantage over societies organized by the other?
3. Describe the position of women in patrilineal and matrilineal families and the difference between a matrilineal society and a matriarchal society.
4. Assess the relationship between kinship terms and

behavior. In our society, we extend kin terms to many who are not biological kin. For example, we may call a Catholic nun *sister*. What does it mean when we do this?

5. Most Americans address their family members using the Inuit kinship system. Is this system adequate for a society with frequent divorce, remarriage, and both formal and informal adoption? Are any new kin terms emerging?

Key Terms

affinal (p. 288)

ambilineal descent (p. 277)

bifurcation (p. 288)

bilateral descent (p. 276)

clan (p. 276)

collateral kin (p. 288)

consanguine (p. 288)

cross-cousins (p. 288)

descent group (p. 275)

descent (p. 275)

double descent (p. 277)

exogamy (p. 276)

inheritance (p. 275)

kindred (p. 286)

kinship system (p. 275)

kinship terminology (p. 287)

kinship (p. 274)

lineage (p. 276)

lineal kin (p. 288)

matrilineage (p. 276)

matrilineal descent (p. 276)

matrilocal residence (p. 284)

parallel cousins (p. 288)

patrilineage (p. 276)

patrilineal descent (p. 276)

patrilocal (p. 281)

segmentary lineage system (p. 279)

succession (p. 275)

transmigrant (p. 294)

transnationalism (p. 294)

unilineal descent (p. 276)

Descriptions of Images and Figures

Back to Figure

On the top center is a circle (yellow) and a triangle (green) with an equal symbol between them which is divided into two, a triangle (yellow) and a circle (green) with an equal symbol between them on the left and right. The left one is again divided into two circles on both sides and two triangles in the middle (all are yellow) with equal symbols between triangles and circles. The right one is again divided into two circles (green and yellow) on both sides and two triangles in the middle (yellow and green) with equal symbols between triangles and circles. The yellow ones are again divided into two, a circle and a triangle (yellow). And the other one is again divided into two, a circle and a triangle (yellow and green).

Back to Figure

On the top center are a triangle (yellow) and a circle (green) with an equal symbol between them which is divided into two, a circle (yellow) and a triangle (green) with an equal symbol between them on the left and right. The left one is again divided into two circles on both sides and two triangles in the middle (all are yellow) with equal symbols between triangles and circles. The right one is again divided into two circles (yellow and green) on both sides and two triangles in the middle (green and yellow) with equal symbols between triangles and circles. The yellow ones are again divided into two, a circle and a triangle (yellow). And the other one is again divided into two, a circle and a triangle (yellow, yellow and green, green).

Back to Figure

The diagram starts with Dada and Dadi which is divided into Phupad, Bhua, Tai, Tau (elder brother), Chachi, Chacha, (younger brother), and Pita. And Nana, Nani divided into Mata, Mama, Mami, Mama, Mami, Masi, Masad. Pita and Mata are divided into Jija, Bhen, Bhabi, Bhai (younger brother), Bhabi, Bhai (elder brother), and Ego. Jija, Bhen divided into Bhanja, Bhanji. Bhabi, Bhai (younger brother) divided into Bhatija, Bhatiji. Sasur, Sas divided into Sali, Sandhu, Sala, Salahar. Ego and Boti are divided into Nu, Putr, and Putri which are again divided into Dota, and Doti.

Back to Figure

The diagram starts from a triangle labeled A and a circle labeled B with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled A and a circle labeled B with an equal symbol between them and a triangle labeled A on the left side. On the right side, two circles labeled B followed by two traingles labelled A with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle labeled B. The first two A and B are divided into C and D. The A and B between the left and right sides are divided into C and D with an “Ego” between them. The B and A on the right side are again divided into C and D and A and B are divided into C and D.

Back to Figure

The diagram starts from a triangle labeled F and a circle labeled E with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled F and a circle labeled E with an equal symbol between them and a triangle labeled A (green) on the left side. On the right side, two circles labeled B (green) and E followed by two triangles labelled F with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle labeled E. The first two F and E are divided into G and G. The A and B between the left and right sides are divided into C and D with an “Ego“ between them. The E and F on the right side are again divided into G and G and F and E are divided into G and G.

Back to Figure

The diagram starts from a triangle and a circle labeled C with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled A and a circle with an equal symbol between them and a triangle labeled A on the left side. On the right side, two circles labeled B followed by two triangles, one is labelled D with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle. The first triangle and a circle labeled C are divided into G and H and the second triangle labeled A and a circle C are divided into E and F. The A and B between the left and right sides are divided into E and F with an “Ego” between them. The circle labeled B and a triangle are again divided into E and F and a triangle labeled D and a circle on the right side are again divided into G and H.

Back to Figure

The digram starts from a triangle and a circle with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled A and a circle labeled C with an equal symbol between them and a triangle labeled A on the left side. On the right side, two circles labeled B followed by two triangles, one is labeled D with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle. The first triangle and a circle are divided into G and H and the second triangle labeled A and a circle labeled C are divided into E and F. The A and B between the left and right sides are divided into E and F with an “Ego” and two circles with an equal symbol between them. The circle labeled B and a triangle are again divided into E and F and a triangle labeled D and a circle on the right side are again divided into two triangles, one is labeled D with two circles in the middle, and one circle is labeled B. The triangle E and circle on the left of “Ego” are divided into a triangle labeled J and a circle labeled I and on right are also divided into a triangle labeled J and a circle labeled I. The circle is labeled F and the triangle is divided into G and H. On the right side, under triangle D and a circle is divided into a triangle labeled D and a circle labeled B. The circle is labeled B and the triangle is divided into E and F.

Back to Figure

The diagram starts from a triangle and a circle with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled A and a circle labeled D with an equal symbol between them and a triangle on the left side. On the right side, two circles one is labeled B followed by two triangles with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle. The first triangle and a circle are divided into a triangle labeled A and circle labeled D with a triangle between them. The second triangle labeled A and a circle labeled D are divided into a triangle labeled E and a circle labeled F. The triangle and circle labeled B between the left and right sides are divided into E and F with an “Ego” between them. The circle and a triangle on the right side are again divided into E and F and a triangle and a circle on the right side are again divided into G and H.

Back to Figure

The digram starts from a triangle labeled K and a circle labeled L with an equal symbol between them followed by another triangle labeled M and a circle labeled N with an equal symbol between them and a triangle labeled O on the left side. On the right side, two circles labeled P and Q are followed by two triangles R and S with an equal symbol between them followed by a circle labeled T. The first triangle K and a circle L are divided into C and D and the second triangle M and a circle N are divided into E and F. The O and P between the left and right sides are divided into A and B with an “Ego” between them. The circle Q and the triangle R are again divided into G and H and a triangle S and a circle T on the right side are again divided into I and J.

11 MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND DOMESTIC GROUPS

Brides and grooms wearing traditional red wedding costumes take a boat tour in Zhouzhaung, China after a group wedding ceremony for 52 couples on May 20, 2020. The date, May 20, in Mandarin Chinese sounds like the phrase “I love you.”

Zhu Jiagen/VCG via Getty Images

Learning Objectives

After you have read this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Define marriage and critical rules associated with it in different cultures.

3. Compare and contrast monogamy, polygyny, and polyandry and give examples of each.

4. Explain the differences between bride service, bride wealth, and dowry and the ways that societies that practice each are likely to differ.

5. Analyze the differences among nuclear, composite, and extended families and the societies in which they're found.

6. Compare some of the ways the societies provide care for their elderly members and critique the elder care practices of your society.

All human societies face the problems of regulating sexual access between males and females, finding satisfactory ways to organize labor, assigning responsibility for childcare, providing a framework for organizing individual rights and responsibilities, and, in many cases, transferring property and social position between generations. For most societies, marriage and family life offer the solutions to these challenges. Ideals, forms, and structures of families in different societies are related to cultural values held in those places. However, they also grow out of the realities of life: Individuals make choices that do not always accord with the rules. And, over time, these choices may affect and change the rules. Anthropologists must pay attention to the rules, the realities, and how both of these change.

Unlike the members of many other species, men and women are continuously receptive to sexual activity rather than only receptive at certain times of the year. Sexual competition is thus continually present in human society. Therefore, the need to regulate sexual access is among the foremost requirements of human society. Further, unlike the offspring of many other species, children are dependent on adults for a very long period after they are born. The formation of stable, socially approved relationships is one way of controlling sexual competition and ensuring a relatively stable environment for raising children. Such relationships need not be permanent, and theoretically, some system other than marriage could have developed. But a relatively stable union between a male and female that involves responsibility for children, as well as economic exchange, became one of the bases for most, though not all, human societies.

Differences in average strength and mobility between males and females as well as the biological role of women in infant nurturing led to a general gendered division of labor in nonindustrial societies. Marriage is the way most societies arrange for the products and services of men and women to be exchanged and for the care of children. An ongoing relationship between partners provides a structure (a family) in which food, nurturing, and security can be provided to help ensure the healthy development of children. Marriage also extends social alliances by linking different families and kin groups together, leading to cooperation among larger groups of people. This expansion of the social group within which people can work together and share resources is very advantageous for survival.

MARRIAGE AND MARRIAGE RULES

Marriage refers to the customs, rules, and obligations that establish a socially endorsed relationship between adults, between adults and children, and between the kin groups of the married people. It involves the transfer of certain rights and obligations. The public nature of marriage is demonstrated by the rituals and ceremonies that surround it in almost every society. The presence of members of the community at these ceremonies is a way of bearing witness to the lawfulness of the marriage. These publicly witnessed and acknowledged ceremonies distinguish marriage from other kinds of unions that resemble it.

Like kinship, marriage and family rest on the biological base of human reproduction. However, also like kinship, marriage and family are ultimately cultural rather than biological phenomena. Because of this, how marriage and family are understood varies greatly from society to society and changes over time and with different political and economic circumstances.

Anthropological research has long documented a broad array of family types, including families built on multiple husbands or multiple wives, same-sex partnerships, and a wealth of other possibilities (Lathrop, 2004, p. 23). Marriage may or may not be necessary to establish the legitimacy or status rights of children. For example, among the Navajo, a woman’s children, whether she is married or not, become full legitimate members of her clan (Stone, 2004, p. 10). We may think of the acceptance of marriage between same-sex partners as being a recent development found only in technologically advanced, wealthy societies (Figure 11.1), but in fact, marriages between same-sex partners are fairly common in the world’s cultures. For example, woman–woman marriage is found among numerous African groups (Cadigan, 1998). In some cases, as among the Nuer, a barren woman may divorce her husband, take another woman as her wife, and then arrange for a surrogate to impregnate this woman. Children born from this arrangement, which did not involve sexual relations between the wives, become members of the barren woman’s patrilineage and refer to her as their father. A similar cultural pattern involving two males is found among the Azande (Kilbride, 2004, p. 17), where royal power was sustained by having multiple wives. When there was a shortage of marriageable women, a man would pay bridewealth for a young man to become his wife. The two men would be socially recognized as a married couple having sexual relations.

Figure 11.1 An LGBT couple bakes cookies with their son.

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Just as any single understanding of marriage finds many exceptions, so, too, does the concept of the family. In the United States, the normative idea of family is two marriage partners of different sexes and their offspring. But the families we really live in often have only one parent or include stepparents and both half- and stepsiblings. In 1968, 85% of children in the United States lived with two married parents. This number dropped steadily through the following three decades. It has remained around 67% since the mid-1990s (Helmez & Washington, 2021). In 2020, 32% of children lived with an unmarried parent, and about 3% didn't live with either parent (Livingston, 2018). A very substantial number of households in the United States do not involve family at all. In 2021, there were about 84 million family households and 46 million nonfamily households in the United States. The majority of nonfamily households consist of a single person.

However, more than 9 million households are composed of unrelated people living together (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and unrelated children and unrelated adults all form family units in the United States.

All societies construct rules about sex, infant care, labor, and rights and obligations between generations, but they do so in very different ways. Societies may also have rules encouraging marriage between members of certain groups and prohibiting it among others, rules determining the number of spouses an individual may have, and rules concerning what happens to a marriage upon the death of one of the partners.

In the United States, marriage is primarily an affair of individuals, and married couples are often encouraged to make a new home apart from their parents. Most people in the United States consider themselves free to choose their mates. They do so based on personal qualities, mutual attraction, and the complex set of feelings Americans call romantic love. Economic considerations are supposed to be subordinated to these aspects. Should the attraction and love between marriage partners end, the marriage is frequently considered to have failed and the partners may divorce and look for new spouses.

However, in most societies (and historically in European and American society), marriage is less an affair of individual romantic love and more a link that binds two families or kinship groups together. In these societies, the choice of a spouse is directly linked to the interests of the family group, and most marriages are arranged. In **arranged marriage**, parents and other relatives play key roles in determining the choice of spouses for their offspring. Often, a key purpose of such marriages is to forge or continue alliances between families or kin groups. In arranging such matches, families tend to look to the economic potential of the husband and his family and the reproductive potential of the wife. Love and attraction might be less important to marriage than economic and reproductive success (Figure 11.2).

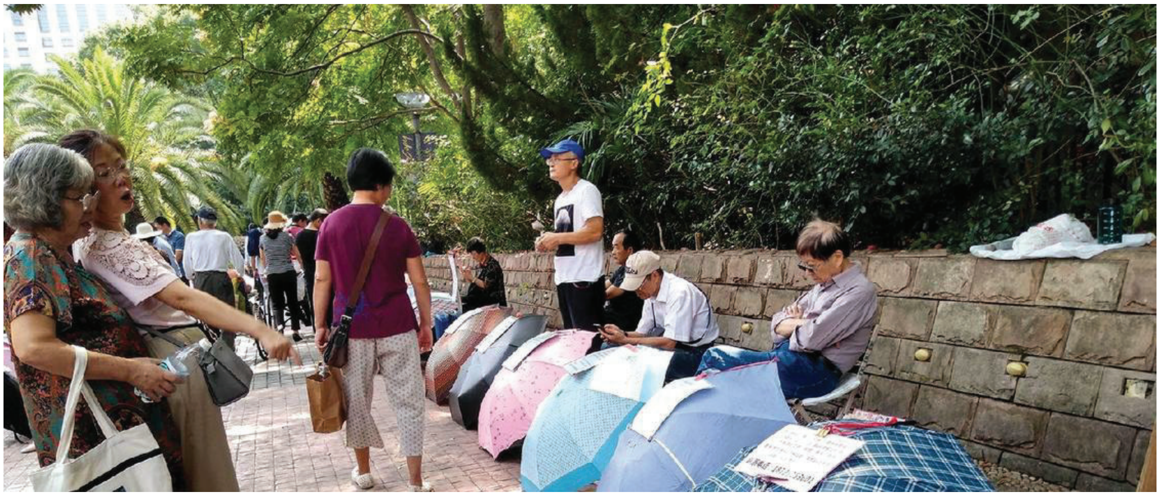


Figure 11.2 In an arranged marriage, parents and other relatives play key roles in determining the choice of spouses for their offspring. Every Saturday and Sunday, at People's Park in Shanghai, China, parents and grandparents gather to seek marriage partners for their unwed children. The written cards on the umbrellas advertise the education, job, salary, personality, zodiac sign, and other characteristics of the child for whom a match is sought.

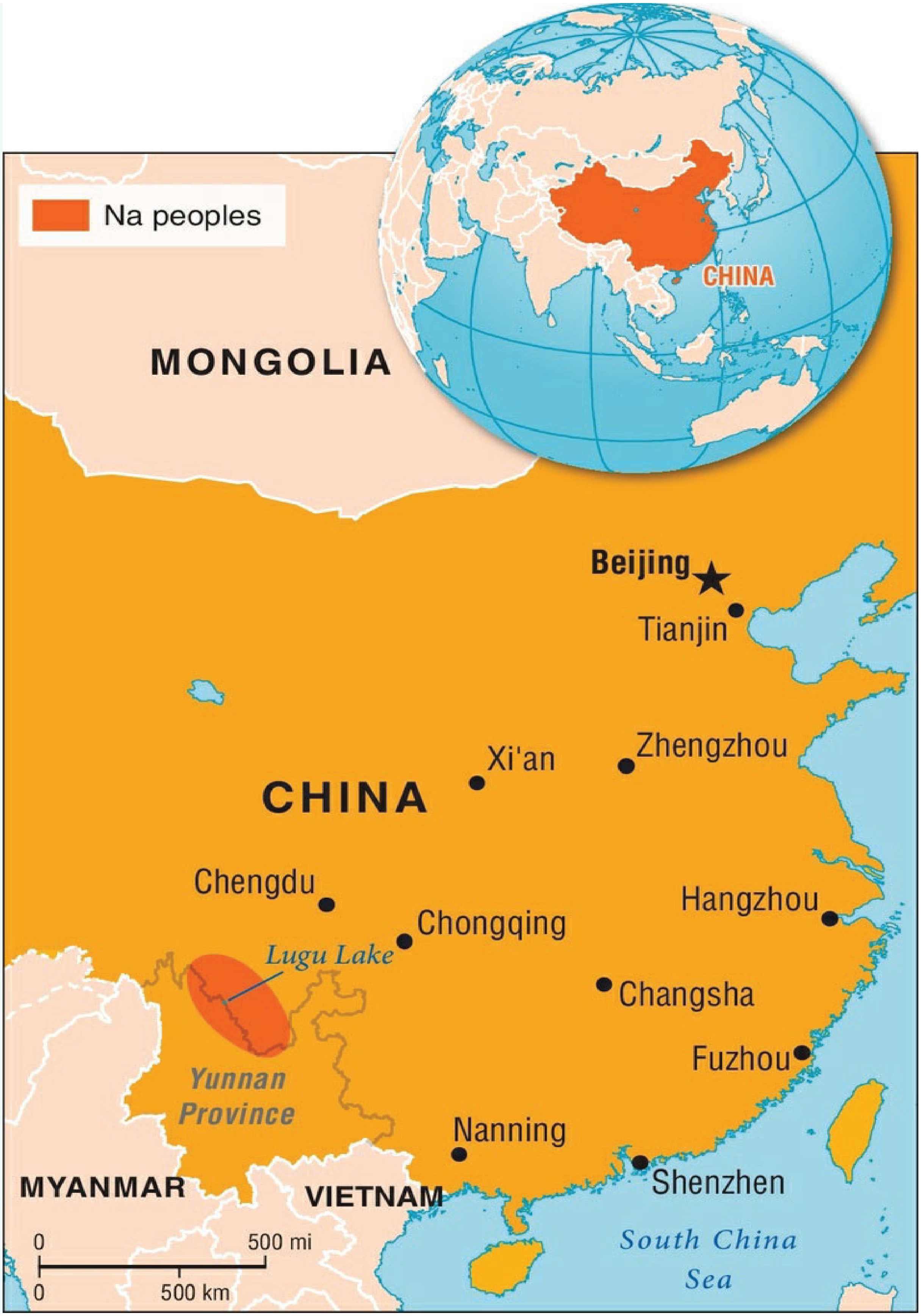
Imaginechina Limited / Alamy Stock Photo

Where marriages are arranged, go-betweens or marriage brokers are sometimes used. A marriage broker has more information about a wider network of families than any one family can have. Furthermore, neither the family of the bride nor that of the groom loses face if the other party rejects its offer.

Although the arranged marriage system tends to become less rigid as societies urbanize and become wealthier, families and larger kin groups in most societies have a great deal of control over marriage and the choice of a spouse. Important cultural rules guide the arranging of marriages, with, to a variable degree, some leeway for individual variation. Different patterns of choosing a mate are closely related to other social and cultural patterns, such as kinship rules, ideals of family structure, transfer of property at marriage, and core cultural values, all of which are related to the ways that people make a living.

Ethnography

Is Marriage Universal? The Na of China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Description

Map 11.1 The location of the Na people in China.

The Na (often called the Mosuo) and some other allied societies of southwest China provide an example of a society whose cultural traditions raise questions about the universality of marriage and the family (Blumenfield, 2004; Hua, 2001; Hong, 2017; Figure 11.3). Na society does not have a word for marriage. The culturally normative and most frequent Na institution that joins men and women in sexual and reproductive partnerships is called *sese* or “walking marriage.” In this relationship, men pass a night in a lover’s household and return to their own families in the morning. All sexual (and potentially reproductive) activity takes place at night during these concealed visits of Na men to the households of the women who have agreed beforehand to lie with them. The Na term for this visit suggests affection, respect, and intimacy, and the partners are called lovers. The *sese* relationship does not, however, include notions of fidelity, permanence, paternal responsibility for children, or economic obligations (Shih, 2001). Both women and men have multiple partners, serially or simultaneously. No records are kept ascertaining the paternity of children, although, in reality, people frequently know biological paternity (Mattison et al., 2014). There are, however, no Na words for illegitimate child, infidelity, or promiscuity; the Na visit is culturally treated as a mutually enjoyable but singular occurrence that entails no future conditions.

Figure 11.3 Na women in traditional dress.

Patrick AVENTURIER/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

Although *sese* relationships are generally not made public unless they become stable, *sese* is a culturally regulated custom, the boundaries of which are clearly understood by all. There is no brute force or coercion in the Na visits. Either party may offer, accept, or decline an invitation for a visit. To spare the other's feelings, one may say, "Tonight is not possible. I already have one for tonight," and a woman may even turn away an invited lover at the door if she chooses. Jealousy is reported not to exist as any man can choose to visit any woman. But although either the woman or the man may initiate the visit, it is always the man who comes secretly to the woman's house. Concealment is necessary because of a Na taboo forbidding a household's male members to hear or see any sexual talk or activities involving household females. Males will never answer the door after dark, lest they encounter a woman's lover. The lover himself makes every effort to avoid detection, often bringing food to prevent the guard dogs' barking, speaking only in whispers during intercourse, and leaving quietly before daybreak.

The Na are a matrilineal society, and, as in many other matrilineal societies, children stay with the mother's household for their entire lives. The household includes both boys and girls by a variety of fathers and relatives of two or more generations. Ideas of motherhood and fatherhood are fluid. When a generation lacks females, a situation that threatens the continuity of the household, a household may adopt a relative's child or encourage a son to bring his lover into the household.

The males in a Na household are boy children born in the various generations who are brothers, uncles, and granduncles. Unlike some other matrilineal societies, Na families have no husbands, fathers, nuclear families, or structures of affinal relationships such as in-laws. The Na consider the matrilineal household as the family, and both household and family are diverse and flexible.

Anthropologists disagree on whether marriage is truly absent among the Na (Harrell, 2002). Although the *sese* is the dominant sexual and reproductive relationship in Na culture, marriage has existed as a parallel cultural institution among the elites. In addition, there are two other, though rather infrequent, patterns of sexual encounter: conspicuous visit and cohabitation. In the conspicuous visit, which always follows a series of secretive visits, the effort to conceal the relationship is abandoned. This usually occurs in a long-term relationship that the community is presumed to know about in any case. Cohabitation, which is even rarer, occurs when a household is short of women to produce children or short of men to labor in its fields; under these circumstances, a woman may bring her lover home as a husband.

The *sese* relationship does not undermine the very strong matrilineal household stability or the economic position of women or children. Male and female Na describe their society as valuing men and women equally, though almost all agree that women work much harder than men and have many more household responsibilities than their brothers.

In Na culture, love among members of the matrilineage is considered more essential and longer lasting than romantic love. Many Na believe that people should not marry because marriage creates conflict within households. On the other hand, some Na say that as they become wealthier, they will marry and move out of their matrilineal households. Indeed, there are now a variety of family types among the Na (Walsh, 2002).

Historically, within the patrilineal, patriarchal, and ancestor-worshipping structure of mainstream Han Chinese culture, the Na have been officially identified as a primitive matriarchy, and the visit was condemned as a barbarous practice. However, in more recent times, the government has marketed the Na as a tourist attraction. This has led to increased exposure of the Na to the majority Han Chinese and also to non-Chinese. New jobs in the tourism industry and opportunities to sell land and to produce commercial crops threaten both the Na family system and the traditional subsistence system (Booth, 2017). Isabel Ullmann (2017) reports that Na people who had moved to the nearby city of Lijiang had mostly given up *sese*. Several of the people she spoke with had dated non-Na people, and four have married people of other ethnic groups.

It is possible that the expansion of China's public education system, as well as the penetration of media imbued with mainstream Han mores and lifestyles into the formerly isolated Na villages, will change the Na family. The Na, like many others, may desire the material benefits of the burgeoning Chinese middle class, but they may also find that integrating their families with the expectations of the Chinese state and Chinese companies is difficult. Despite a strong ethnic identity that includes the *sese*, as the Na enter the wider world, their "walking marriage" may be one more example of human cultural diversity that ultimately faces extinction. If so, the world will be a poorer place for it.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Can you envision a society without marriage? What do you think that society would look like?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages, from the Na point of view, of their system of "walking marriage" and matrilineal families?
3. How well adapted is the Na family to the industrial and postindustrial world? Are there reasons why Na family structure would be unlikely to succeed in a modern city?

Incest Taboos

Incest taboos are rules that prohibit sexual relationships with specific categories of kin. All societies have incest taboos, but the types of kin covered by these rules vary from group to group. Because in most instances, sexual access is one of the key rights given to marriage partners, incest taboos are a critical factor in determining who may marry whom.

In almost every case, incest taboos ban sex between parents and their children and between brothers and sisters. However, there have been exceptions to even this rule. Brother–sister marriage was practiced by Egyptian royalty, in traditional Hawaiian society, and among the Inca in Peru. In these cases, such marriages probably served to keep family wealth and power intact and limit rivalries for succession to kingship (Middleton, 1962). Brother–sister marriage may have been relatively common in Roman Egypt. Official Roman census rolls from the 1st to 3rd century AD show that more than 16% of marriages in which researchers could determine the degree of kin occurred between people listed as full brothers and sisters. However, interpreting these statistics is difficult. Huebner (2007), for example, has claimed that these were really marriages between biological and adopted children conducted to provide lineage continuity. But Remijsen and Clarysse (2008) and Parker (1996) have argued that these were indeed marriages between biological siblings (though they may also have had the purpose of preserving lineage and property).

In many societies, people beyond immediate family members are also included in the incest taboo. Sometimes, sexual relations between members of a lineage are prohibited. Sometimes, the prohibition on sex extends to include all clan members, and in some cases, those with whom an individual is prohibited from having sex may include half of the total population.

Most Americans consider all the children of their parents’ brothers and sisters to be cousins. However, many societies use kinship terminology that separates cross-cousins (mother’s brothers’ or father’s sisters’ children) and parallel cousins (mother’s sisters’ or father’s brothers’ children). In these societies, it is common for sex between either cross- or parallel cousins (but not both) to be considered incest. This is important because it shows that the incest taboo is social, not biological. People have the same genetic relationship with their cross- and parallel cousins. However, they often have different social relations with them.

Many different explanations have been proposed for the universal existence of the incest taboo. However, none of them is entirely satisfactory. Theories about the incest taboo fall into three broad categories: biological, psychological, and sociological. Biologically based theories argue that the incest taboo prevents inbreeding that would have a deleterious effect on humanity. In other animal species, sex between parent and offspring or siblings is often prevented by expelling junior members from family groups as they reach sexual maturity. Humans have no such biological mechanism but accomplish the same function with the incest taboo.

There are problems with this theory. First, although there is no doubt that sex between close biological relatives leads to increased birth defects, it is not clear that this would be visible in premodern societies, which typically have extremely high infant mortality and very rarely have a systemic collection of statistical data. Thus, it would be extremely difficult for society members to see the biological effects of having offspring with close relatives. Second, as we have seen, the incest taboo often treats people with the same degree of biological relatedness differently. Finally, people who are both closely and distantly related are often taboo to each other.

Psychologically based theories argue either that we have an innate aversion to those with whom we are raised (Westermarck, 1894; Spiro et al., 1994) or that sexual competition among siblings or parents and children would create disruption and kin role confusion in the family (Malinowski, 1927). However, these theories do not account for the patterns of incest and avoidance shown in all different societies. Further, if aversion to some people is innate, there should be no need for a social rule against it. Nor is it clear that incest taboos would be the only way to solve the problems they raise.

Finally, sociological theories argue that incest taboos force families to marry outside of their group and that this creates bonds between social groups that are useful in helping these groups survive, particularly in difficult times. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, quoted the response Margaret Mead received when she asked about a man marrying his sisters:

> What, you would like to marry your sister? What is the matter with you? Don’t you want a brother-in-law? Don’t you realize that if you marry another man’s sister and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in-law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, with whom will you garden, with whom will you visit? (in Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 485)

This is a powerful argument; however, the alliance theory concerns marriage rather than sexual relations. It is possible to imagine a society where individuals must marry outside of their family groups but are permitted to have sex within those groups, but no such society exists.

Exogamy and Endogamy

Incest taboos and other aspects of social organization create rules that restrict the selection of marriage partners to members of certain groups. The marriage rule of **exogamy** specifies that a person must marry outside specific groups. In every society, one must marry outside of the groups with whom sexual relations are considered incestuous. However, exogamy may also apply to groups far beyond those. Most often, groups based on descent, such as lineages and clans, are exogamous.

The advantages of exogamy include the reduction of conflict over sex within the community and the promotion of alliances with other groups and communities. Such alliances may have economic, political, or religious components. Indeed, these intergroup rights and obligations are among the most important kinds of relationships established by marriage.

Early humans living in foraging bands exchanged members through marriage to live in peace with one another and to extend the social ties of cooperation. One outstanding feature of marriage arrangements among foragers is a system of trade and alliance between groups that exchange wives. These alliances are important among peoples who must move frequently to find food. Different groups take turns visiting and playing host to one another. This intergroup sociability is made easier by exogamy.

One consequence of exchanging members is that each foraging camp becomes dependent on others for a supply of spouses and is allied with others through the bonds that result from marriage. This system contributes to the maintenance of peaceful relations among groups that move around, camp with one another, and exploit overlapping territories. It does not entirely eliminate intergroup aggression, but it helps keep it to a manageable level.

In peasant societies, rules of exogamy may apply to entire villages. In northern India, a man must take a wife from outside his village. Through exogamy, each village becomes a center in a kinship network that spreads over hundreds of villages. The fact that wives come from many different villages gives the typical Indian village a cosmopolitan character. Village exogamy also affects other aspects of life. For example, in a household where brothers' wives come from different places and are strangers to one another, conflicts are likely to occur. This potential for conflict helps explain rules of conduct such as the repression of aggression common in northern Indian families.

Endogamy is a rule that requires marriage within one's own group, however that group is defined. Endogamy tends to keep the relative status of groups intact: Privileged and wealthy groups remain powerful, while poorer groups remain unable to access wealth and power. As we saw in our discussion of the Indian caste, castes are hierarchically ranked and are endogamous. A person must marry someone of their own caste and frequently within the specific section (*jati*) of the caste to which they belong. The offspring of such endogamous marriages have the same group membership as their parents. This, in theory, keeps group membership boundaries clear and preserves the status ranking of the groups.

Interracial marriage in the United States is a good example of group endogamy. In the past, marriage between white and Black people in the United States was prohibited by law in many states and by very strong social customs in others. This was critical to the maintenance of white social and economic domination. In many places in the United States, there were different laws and different social expectations for members of different races. People who are acknowledged to be biracial upset the logic of the social system. Thus, there must be strong social and legal discouragement from race mixing, and racially mixed people must be assigned an unambiguous group identity. In the United States, this idea was sometimes called “the one-drop rule,” a social and legal principle that identified an individual with any noticeable African ancestry as unambiguously Black. In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled that laws banning racial exogamy were illegal. At that time, 16 states still had such laws. Unenforced laws banning interracial marriage remained on the books in South Carolina and Alabama until the end of the 20th century.

In the current-day United States, there are no legal restrictions on marriage between groups. In 1958, only 4% of Americans approved of marriages between Black and white people. Today, 94% do (Mccarthy, 2021). Marriage among people of different racial and ethnic groups has risen sharply (Figure 11.4). In 2015, about one in six new marriages was between partners of different ethnic or racial groups. In that year, about 10% of all married people wed to someone of a different racial or ethnic group (Livingston & Brown, 2017). The 2020 census reported that there were almost 34 million in the United States who identify as multiracial, a 276% increase since 2010, though some of this reflects differences in how the questions about race and ethnicity were asked in 2010 and 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). However, old patterns remain. We tend to marry those who are members of our own social group, and many, if not most, social groups remain divided by class, ethnicity, religion, and race. An old proverb says that it is just as easy to love a rich person as a poor one. That may be true, but most often rich people meet and socialize with other rich people. You are unlikely to socialize with rich people unless you are rich yourself.

Figure 11.4 In the United States, racial groups have been mostly endogamous. In 1967, when the Supreme Court ruled that laws banning racial exogamy were illegal, 16 states still had such laws. Unenforced laws banning interracial marriage remained on the books in South Carolina and Alabama until the end of the 20th century.

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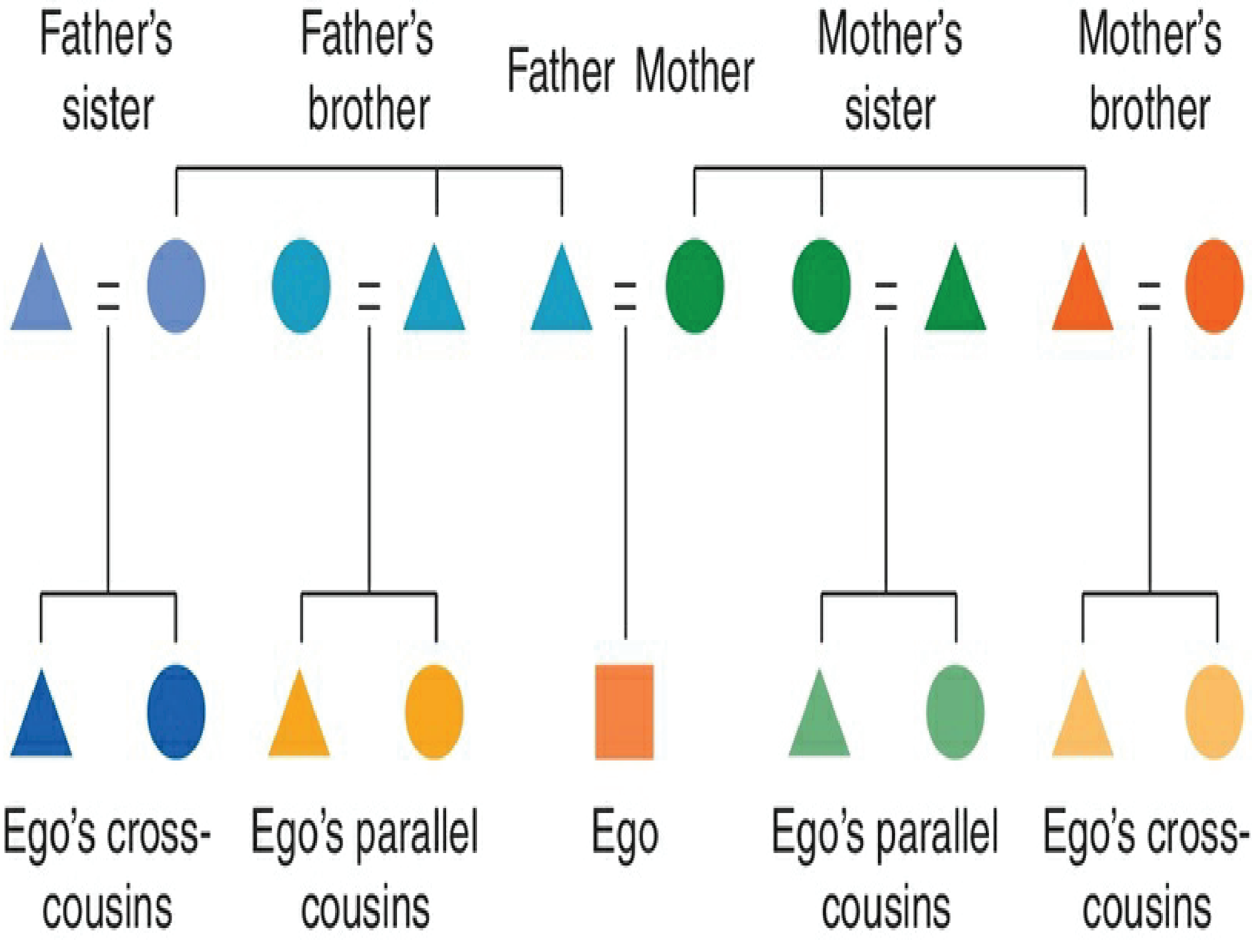
Preferential Marriages

In addition to rules about whom one may not marry and the group within which one must marry, some societies have rules about the preferred categories of relatives from which marriage partners are drawn. Preferred marriage partners are often children of siblings of the parental generation (cousins, in our kin terminology) who are biologically related but who may not culturally be defined as such.

We saw previously that in societies that differentiate between cross-cousins and parallel cousins, sex with members of one or the other of these categories may be considered incestuous (Figure 11.5). However, it is also the case that marriage to a member of one or the other of them might be considered ideal. Preferential cousin marriage is related to the organization of kinship units larger than the nuclear family. Where descent groups are unilineal, an individual's cross-cousin will not be a member of their kin group but will be a member of one of their parents' kin groups. For example, in a patrilineal society, a person is a member of their father's and his siblings' kin group but not the kin group of their mother. However, their mother's brother and his children are members of their mother's kin group. Thus, a marriage with the child of a mother's brother will reinforce ties between kin groups established in the preceding generation and establish a multigenerational alliance between these groups.


Father's sister
Father's brother
Father
Mother
Mother's sister
Mother's brother
Ego's cross-cousins
Ego's parallel cousins
Ego
Ego's parallel cousins
Ego's cross-cousins

Description

Figure 11.5 This diagram indicates the relationships of cross-cousins and parallel cousins. In many cultures, these relationships are important for determining who can and cannot marry and for designating preferred marriage partners. Western cultures distinguish cousins by degree of biological closeness but do not distinguish between cross-cousins and parallel cousins for purposes of marriage.

Where there are unilineal descent groups that practice lineage endogamy, parallel-cousin marriage might be considered ideal.

Parallel cousins are members of an individual’s own kinship group, and marriage to one will reinforce the individual’s own lineage but at the price of weakening ties between lineages. Numerous groups in the Middle East, including Kurds, Bedouin, and some Turks and Tunisians, have preferential marriage to parallel cousins. In these patrilineal societies, both descent and inheritance follow the male line. Parallel-cousin marriage keeps economic resources within the family and helps prevent their fragmentation. It also reinforces the solidarity of brothers, but by socially isolating groups of brothers, it adds to factional disputes and disunity within larger social systems. However, as James Keyser (1974, p. 307) notes, preferential marriage expresses the “ideal set of relationships which should obtain in marriage … [but] whether marriage to a … parallel [or cross] cousin fulfills these expectations is problematical.”

Many Americans look down on cousin marriage. However, marrying one’s first cousin was extremely common in the United States and Western Europe until the mid-19th century. Also, there does not seem to be much risk of genetic problems from such unions. Children of first cousins face a 2% or 3% higher risk of genetic issues than the population at large—about the same as any child born to a woman older than 40. Anthropologist Robin Fox has estimated that about 80% of all marriages in history have been between first or second cousins (Conniff, 2003). Currently, all U.S. states allow second cousins to marry, and 20 allow first cousins to marry.

The Levirate and Sororate

The **levirate** is a custom whereby a widow is married to the brother of her deceased husband. This is sometimes referred to as wife inheritance. The **sororate** is a custom whereby a widower is married to the sister of his deceased wife. Sometimes, particularly in the case of the levirate, this is done out of concern for the widow, who may otherwise have no place in her husband’s family. However, the primary importance of both levirate and sororate is to maintain the link between the families of the marriage partners. Marriage in most societies is a type of contract of alliance between families. The contract specifies the transfer of people, rights, and property. The early deaths of marriage partners threaten the marriage contract and the alliance between families. The levirate and sororate allow for family alliances to survive the deaths of individual family members.

Ombretta Ingrasci (in Pipyrou, 2016) reported on the levirate in southern Italy. In this region, widows are seen as sexually promiscuous, and it is difficult for them to remarry. Further, children of such widows are at a disadvantage because their family name is perceived to be stained. In this situation, the brother of a dead husband marries his brother’s widow to preserve the family name and ensure respectable marriages for his nieces. This action further helps to keep peace among families in an area where vendettas are common.

Ghost marriage is a related concept. Among the Nuer, if a man dies childless, his brother may marry a woman in his deceased brother’s name. Thus, the brother has wives in his own name and wives in the name of his deceased brother. The offspring of ghost marriages are designated as children of the deceased. This practice enables the continuation of the brother’s family line despite his having died childless. Both examples emphasize the role of the levirate in maintaining family names and alliances despite the deaths of marriage partners.

Where there are no available marriage partners in the right relationship to the deceased for a preferential marriage, other kin may be substituted. For example, if a man is supposed to marry his father’s sister’s daughter, the daughters of all women classified as his father’s sisters (whether or not they are biologically in this relationship) are eligible as marriage partners. Sometimes, if no brother, sister, or other qualifying relative is available, or if the new partners to be married have strong objections, the levirate or sororate will not take place. A point to note here is that the levirate and the sororate are ideals; they refer to what people say *should* happen in their society, not to what necessarily does happen.

MARRIAGES WITH MULTIPLE PARTNERS

All societies have rules about how many spouses a person may have at one time. Societies that have the rule of **monogamy** allow only two partners to be married to each other at any given time. Monogamous marriage is typical of most current-day wealthy, industrialized societies. **Polygamy** is the term anthropologists use to refer to marriages in which there are more than two partners. It includes **polygyny**, the marriage of one husband to several wives, and **polyandry**, the marriage of one wife to several husbands. Most societies permit (and prefer) polygyny. Polygyny was permitted in China until 1950 and in India, for Hindus, until 1955. Polygyny remains legal for Muslims in India as well as in many countries with large Muslim populations such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. In a classic survey of the world's societies, George Peter Murdock (1949) found that about 75% permitted and encouraged polygyny. Murdock believed that polyandry was extremely rare. However, more recent analyses have found that it is fairly common, particularly in small-scale foraging and gardening societies (Starkweather & Hames, 2012). Although polygyny and polyandry are permitted and often encouraged in many societies, even in these cases, most people are married monogamously.

Polygyny

In a polygynous household, a husband has several wives (Figure 11.6). Polygyny tends to occur in situations where the labor of a large number of wives and their children can increase a family's wealth. This often happens where agricultural or horticultural labor is critical and where land is plentiful compared to the population. Polygyny also allows a husband to make marriage alliances with many different family groups. Thus, important men may use it to take wives from many different clans or villages.

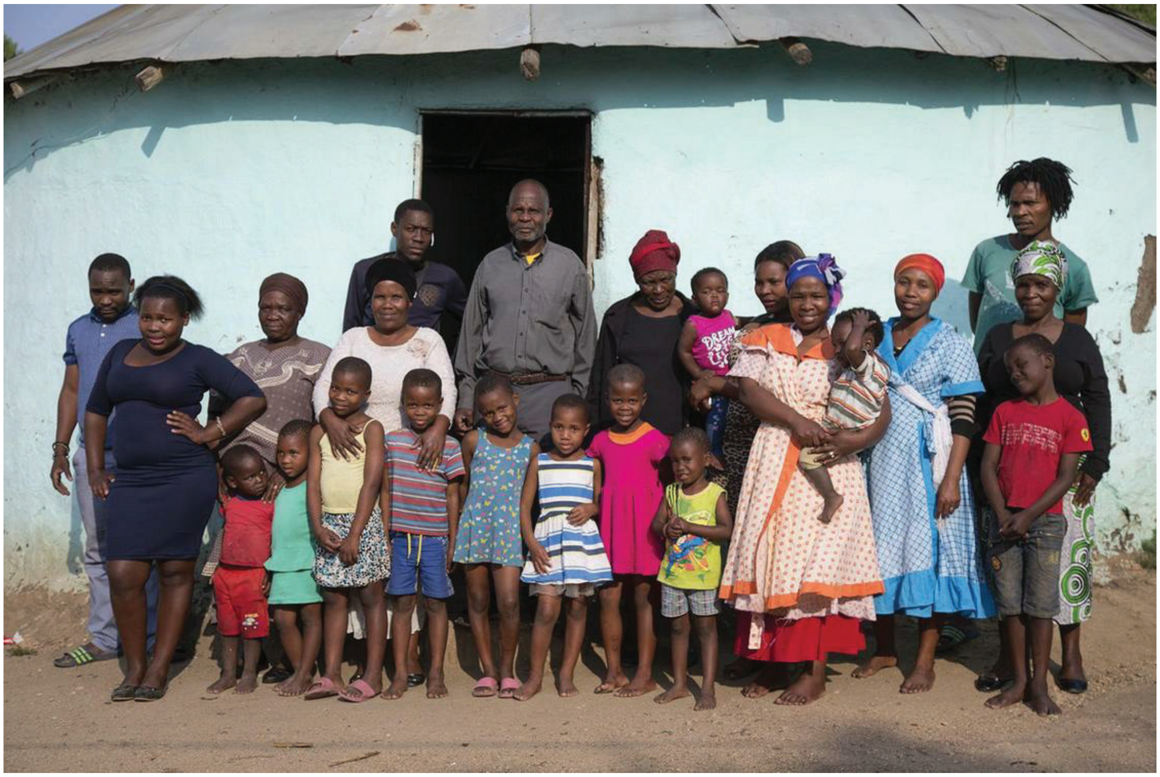


Figure 11.6 In a polygynous household a husband has several wives. Here Johannes Mzobe, his four wives, and family in Kwa Madlala, South Africa in 2016 .

Rogan Ward/picture alliance via Getty Images

In the United States, we often equate large numbers of children with poverty. In our society, children are expensive to raise and rarely provide direct economic benefits to parents. However, in societies in which children do economically productive work, the more children a family has, the greater its wealth. Polygyny increases the number of children in the families that practice it. Families in which husbands have multiple wives are likely to be wealthier than those in which marriage is monogamous. The alliances with other families created through polygyny as well as the size of polygynous families confer political advantages on them as well. Thus, in societies that practice polygyny, wives are often in the position of marrying monogamously and being relatively poor or marrying polygynously and being better off. Women’s attitudes toward polygyny vary both within and among societies. Among the Yoruba and the Kaguru (two African societies), polygyny is common. A study of polygyny among the Yoruba found that most women said they would be pleased with a polygynous marriage. However, most Kaguru women do not support it (Meekers & Franklin, 1995). Additionally, a 2021 study by Ismail Shaiful Bahari and his colleagues reported that, around the world, women in polygynous marriages were at a substantially higher risk for depression than those in monogamous marriages. Children of polygynous marriages are also somewhat more likely to have psychological distress than offspring of monogamous marriages.

All societies have approximately equal numbers of men and women (although these numbers may sometimes be altered by war or by childrearing practices that favor one sex over another). Thus, if some husbands have many wives, others must have few or none. There are two important results of this. First, most men in the society cannot be married polygynously at any single time. Second, in these societies, women tend to marry early and men late. This means that husbands often predecease their wives, who then become available for remarriage.

Although many advantages in polygynous families seem to go to men, women often benefit as well. First, polygynous families tend to be wealthier families. Beyond this, in some societies, women welcome the addition of a co-wife because it eases their own workload and provides daily companionship. When women live with their husband’s family, having co-wives may also provide a measure of protection against brutal husbands. However, a study of polygynously married women in Ghana reported that the key reason why women supported polygyny was infertility. Women who were infertile saw the addition of a co-wife as protecting their marriages from divorce. Such women were likely to have great difficulty finding a second marriage (Tabi et al., 2010).

People from cultures where sexual fidelity in marriage is considered essential (particularly in the context of romantic love) may expect to find sexual jealousy in polygynous societies. Jealousy may indeed occur. In many languages, the word a woman uses for another woman married to the same husband is a variation on the words for rivalry and jealousy. For example, in Luo, a language common in East Africa, wives married to the same husband call each other *nyieka*, which can be translated as “my partner in jealousy” (LeVine, 1962). In Salish, a language of the Northwest Pacific Coast of America, the word means “rival” (Kuiper, 2002), and in Hindi and Telugu, languages used in India, the word is *sapatni* (सपत्नी) and suggests enemy or adversary. But relations between co-wives may also be friendly and helpful. Some polygynous societies have mechanisms to minimize conflict between co-wives. For example, in **sororal polygyny**, a man marries a set of sisters who may get along with each other more easily than women who are strangers to each other. Also, co-wives usually live in separate dwellings. A husband who wants to avoid conflict will attempt to distribute his economic resources and sexual attentions evenly among his wives so there will be no accusations of favoritism.

Temne Polygyny

The Temne are an ethnic group living in Sierra Leone in West Africa. Anthropologist Vernon Dorjahn (1988, 1977) studied polygyny among the Temne for three decades in the 20th century, from the 1950s through the 1970s. Dorjahn worked in both urban and rural settings and compared the incidence of polygyny between them. He found that in the era he studied, polygyny was very common. In rural areas, around 40% of men had more than one wife, and about 60% of women were in marriages in which they had a co-wife.

Temne men and women value marriage very highly. In rural areas, it is very difficult to live as a single adult, and people who have large families are generally better off than those with small families. Further, people may not be considered fully adult until they are married and have children. However, the strong desirability of marriage does not mean that husbands and wives are emotionally close. Dorjahn notes that in general, while the Temne place very high importance on marriage, they may not value particular husbands or wives very highly (p. 372).

In Temne households, men make most of the major family decisions but will almost always consult their first wife before taking additional wives. They recognize that adding a new wife without the permission of current wives often leads to family strife. However, in many cases, both men and women are motivated to add wives to the family. Among rural men and women, Dorjahn found that 70% of men wanted an additional wife, as did 35% of women. Fifty-two percent of women considered polygyny undesirable, but only 28% of men did.

In general, the greatest reason to add wives is that Temne understand polygyny and the establishment of large families as a pathway to prosperity. However, the most common reason women gave for desiring an additional wife was to help with household work. Some of the other reasons women gave were to have help in times of illness, to have more children in the household, and to have company. Two additional factors were important for women. First, having numerous co-wives sometimes gave women a great deal of freedom. They could become traders, earning their own income outside of the household. Husbands sometimes encouraged this, since some of the money their wives earned could be used to support the household. Second, the Temne understand men as naturally promiscuous. Women often believe that it is better to have additional wives in the family than for husbands to sleep around, particularly since they think the latter carries a higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases. This is made more important because Temne women are supposed to abstain from sex for 18 months following the birth of a child.

Both men and women use a variety of strategies when they want to add wives to the family. Husbands will load their wives with work and then promote their idea that their workloads will be much lighter if there are additional wives. Women may manipulate polygyny to lighten their workloads, seek additional freedoms, and, in some cases, as a prelude to divorce.

Relations between co-wives are highly variable, and there are many instances in which polygynous families do not work out. This may be particularly the case when a young woman is pressured to marry a much older polygynously married man. However, in most cases, co-wives are cooperative. Although husbands are technically in charge of the family, co-wives have a great deal of power when they band together. Household work slowdowns, intentionally poor cooking, demands for gifts, and other tactics are used to gain the compliance of husbands. Dorjahn’s male informants told him that “no man can stand against [the] resistance [of his wives] for long; he must capitulate in the end” (p. 375).

Over the years of his work, Dorjahn noted both that urban areas had less polygyny than rural areas and that polygyny was declining somewhat. In the 1950s, almost 43% of the rural male population had more than one wife. By the 1970s, this had declined to a bit more than 38%. During these same years, the percentage of women married polygynously also decreased, from almost 65% to a bit under 60%. The fact that polygyny was less common in urban areas, and perhaps the decline in polygyny overall, has been linked to both economic and ideological pressures. Christian missionaries and Western educated elites have campaigned against polygyny. Well-educated men and women are less likely to want to be in polygynous marriages. Additionally, in urban areas, the expenses of maintaining a polygynous family are far higher and the benefits lower than they are in rural areas.

Although polygyny in Sierra Leone has continued to decline in the years since Dorjahn’s studies, it remains strong. The 2019 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2020) reported that across all of Sierra Leone, 30% of women and 15% of men were in polygynous marriages. The numbers continued to be higher for rural than urban areas, with 36% of rural women having one or more co-wives as compared to only 20% of women in cities. The link between education and the rejection of polygyny continues: 9% of women and 7% of men with more than a secondary education are in polygynous marriages, while 36% of women and 19% of men with no education are married polygynously.

Polyandry

Polyandry (the marriage of one woman to more than one man) is found among people in many parts of the world. It is well known in Tibet as well as in Yunnan Province in China and the Ladakh region in northern India. It was practiced in costal southern India as well (Figure 11.7). It was common among Native American peoples, including the Shoshoni, Northern Paiute, Inuit, and others. It is found in many places in Africa, including among the Irigwe people in Nigeria and in societies in South America such as the Bari and Yanomama Shirishana (Starkweather, 2009). As in societies that practice polygyny, most men in polyandrous societies are married monogamously. Polygynous marriages are sometimes present in polyandrous societies as well. Most polyandrous marriages involve brothers sharing a wife, but there are some societies such as the Toda and Nayar in India that practice nonfraternal polyandry as well.

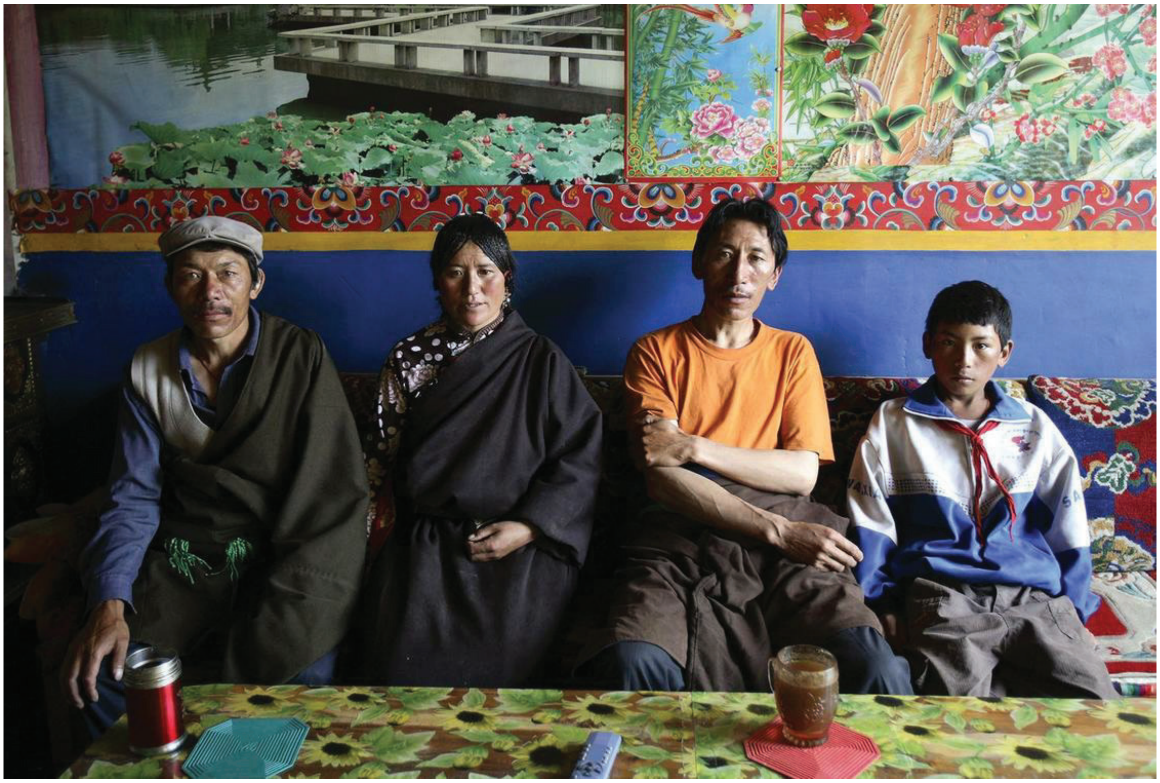


Figure 11.7 In a polyandrous family a wife is married to more than one husband. Here, La Wen, Cai Zhuo, Gama Sangding and their child Gelai Bajiua, are shown at their home near Yushu in Tibet in 2007.

China Photos/Getty Images

Premi Polyandry

Koen Wellens (2010) has studied polyandry, history, and economy in Yunnan province, China, near Tibet. His work focuses on a group called the Premi, who live close to the Na described in the reading assignment in this chapter. In the early 2000s, Wellens worked in an area he refers to as “Bustling Township” and reports that, even though both polygynous and polyandrous marriages are illegal in China, about one quarter of all marriages in the communities of the southern part of the township were polyandrous with two or more brothers sharing a single wife. In the local language, the same term, *apo*^{n}, is used for both father and father’s brother. Several additional marriages were polygynous, but with two or more sisters sharing a single husband. Mother and mother’s sister are also referred to with the same term.

Several factors seem to account for the prevalence of polygyny in “Bustling Township” and in numerous other places. These communities are strongly patrilineal and mostly patrilocal. That is, people are members of their father’s family and inherit land and most other identities from that family. After marriage, the new couple moves into the family of the husband. Additionally, although the communities are largely dependent on agriculture, all of the available arable land is taken and there is no way to bring new land into cultivation. Under these economic circumstances, for families to prosper, it is critical that family land be kept together. The result is that families in “Bustling Township” practice a “monomarital” tradition: Only one marriage in each generation may produce offspring.

The cases of marriages with two sisters sharing a husband seem to confirm the “monomarital” principle. In these cases, the sisters’ family had no sons to inherit the land. Marrying a single husband gave the husband’s patrilineage rights to the land and kept it intact.

However, the desire to keep family property together by itself cannot explain polyandry. There are other ways of accomplishing the same thing. For example, many European societies practiced primogenitor, a system of patrilineal inheritance in which the eldest son inherited all of his father’s property and younger sons inherited nothing. In primogenitor systems, daughters, or, in many cases, the husbands of daughters, also receive dowry payments. Clearly, cultural factors play a strong role in polyandry and in primogenitor as well.

For people in “Bustling Township,” at least two cultural factors are very important. First, all families are members of clans, and marriages must be clan exogamous. However, people must also marry someone from a relatively small region. So, marriage is clan exogamous but area endogamous. That is, marriages must take place only between people of different clans but within the same region. Relatively few clans are present in the local area, and the total number of available marriage partners is low. Second, there is a very strong ethos of family mutual support. Families are identified with specific physical houses, and equality and solidarity among members of a house are central to the culture.

In “Bustling Township,” almost all marriages are arranged by parents. When Wellens asked parents why they would choose polyandrous marriages for their children, the answers were almost always economic. They said that brothers marrying the same wife was good for maintaining and increasing family wealth. It also made it easier to pursue economic advancement by finding jobs in nearby towns. Because of this perception, economic development and new possibilities for prosperity may, at least in the short run, increase rather than diminish polyandry.

The combination of economic and cultural factors that we described above seems to account for much of the polyandry in Tibet, as well as the areas of China and India that border on it. However, they do not apply to other places in which land was not in short supply. As with monogamy, polygyny and many other social practices, the sources lie partly in adaptation to environmental, economic, and political conditions and partly in the idiosyncratic histories of cultures.

EXCHANGES OF GOODS AT MARRIAGE

We can think of marriages as having two parts. One part involves the rights of people. It includes the granting of rights of sexual access of husband and wife to each other, which family has rights over any children born to the wife, obligations by one or both parents to care for children born to the union, and rights of husband and wife to the economic services of each other. A second part of the marriage process is the exchange of goods, land, and sometimes labor between individuals and family groups. If these exchanges are not completed, the rights in marriage can be forfeited. Three kinds of exchanges made in connection with marriage are bride service, bridewealth, and dowry.

Bride Service and Bridewealth

In **bride service**, the husband must work for a specified period for his wife's family in exchange for marital rights. Bride service is common in societies where there is relatively little material wealth. These include many foraging and gardening societies. For example, among the Orang Rimba of Sumara in Indonesia, bride service can last for several years (Sager, 2016). There is a similar practice among the Yanomamö. In this society, bride service consists mainly of the husband hunting to provide meat to his bride's family (Chagnon et al., 2017). During bride service, a man works under the direction of his future father-in-law, who may control the man's access to his bride. Marriage arrangements do not always survive the period of bride service. Either party may break the agreement.

The most common form of marriage exchange is **bridewealth**, in which cash or goods are given by the groom's kin to the bride's kin as part of a marriage agreement (Figure 11.8). Bridewealth was sometimes called *bride price*, an inaccurate term conveying the misleading perception that women are simply bought by one family from another. Like other marriage exchanges, bridewealth provides for intergenerational wealth transfers and legitimates the new reproductive and socioeconomic unit created by the marriage. In societies where bridewealth is customary, a person can claim compensation for a violation of marriage rights only if the bridewealth has been paid. Furthermore, bridewealth paid at marriage is returned (subject to specified conditions) if a marriage is terminated.

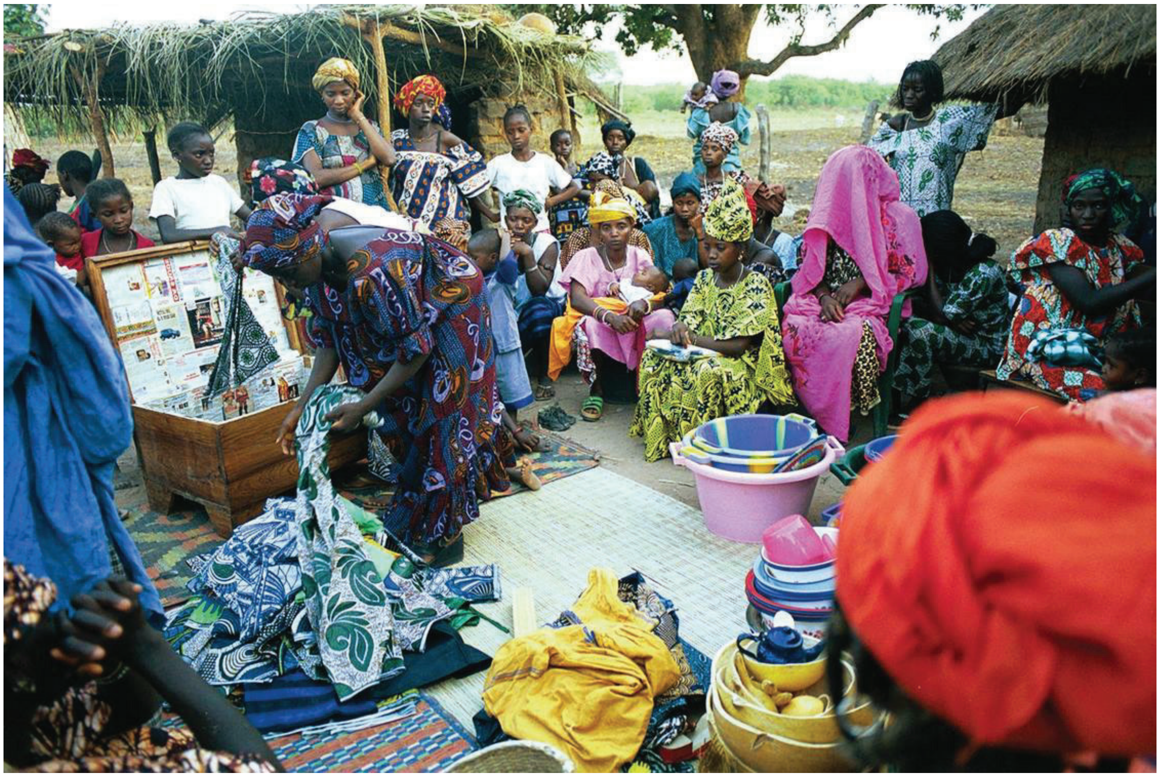


Figure 11.8 Bridewealth often includes the presentation of goods from the family of the husband to the family of the wife. Here, Fulani women from a village in Guinea Bissau examine goods given in bridewealth for a member of their family.

Ami Vitale/Alamy Stock Photo

Although most studies of bridewealth emphasize its role in entitling the husband with domestic, economic, sexual, and reproductive rights to his wife, bridewealth also confers rights on the wife. By establishing the marriage as legal—that is, recognized and supported by public sanctions—bridewealth allows wives to hold their husbands accountable for violations of conjugal rights. By sanctioning the proper exchanges of rights and obligations of both husbands and wives, bridewealth serves to stabilize marriage by giving both families a vested interest in keeping the couple together. It makes divorce difficult since if a wife leaves a husband, he and his family are likely to demand the return of any bridewealth they have paid to her family. In many, perhaps most cases, the bride's family will be unwilling and unable to pay. Divorces, however, do occur in societies with bridewealth, as do long and sometimes deadly disputes about the return of bridewealth.

Bridewealth transactions occur around the world. For example, in the late 20th century, 79% of marriages in rural China involved bridewealth, as did 93% of marriages in rural Thailand; 93% of marriages in Cairo, Egypt; and 98% of marriages in rural Uganda (Anderson, 2007, p. 153). They are common among East African pastoralists such as the Gusii, Turkana, and Kipsigis. Cattle, which dominate these societies culturally and economically, traditionally make up the greater part of bridewealth. Bridewealth payments are embedded in the economic strategies of households; they are related to how men and women engage in labor, distribute property, and maintain or enhance status. Thus, the amount of bridewealth paid varies as people adapt to changing economic, demographic, and social conditions.

The ways in which bridewealth can adapt to changing conditions is illustrated by the Kipsigis, a herding and gardening society in East Africa. Although bridewealth payments extend over many years in some societies, the Kipsigis make a single bridewealth payment, which historically consisted of livestock but now includes some cash. The Kipsigis distribute the bridewealth within the immediate families of the bride and the groom. The groom's father pays for the first marriage, and the groom himself pays for subsequent marriages, although grooms working for wages may also help with the first marriage payment. The bride's parents are primarily responsible for the negotiation and final acceptance of the bridewealth offer (Borgerhoff Mulder, 1995, p. 576). Most marriages are arranged, and sometimes offspring are brought into line by threats that their parents will not pay bridewealth. Kipsigi parents negotiating a marriage must balance their desire for high bridewealth payments with their concern for their daughter's happiness, the need to attract a good son-in-law, and the desire to avoid impoverishing the daughter in her new household.

Kipsigis bridewealth amounts have fluctuated as economic circumstances have changed. In the past, when agricultural land was available and prices for crops were high, bridewealth was high because of the importance of women's labor in cultivation. In the 20th century, the population increased, and land became scarce. Therefore, the value of women's labor in agriculture declined. At the same time, increased urbanization and participation in the national and global economy opened numerous new opportunities for men to invest their wealth. Both trends pushed the average bridewealth down. However, economic changes also opened new avenues for women. Parents of girls educated beyond elementary school often began to demand high bridewealth both as compensation for the high school fees they spent on their daughter and because of the benefit her increased earning potential would bring to her marital home. So, while average bridewealth fell, bridewealth for elite women rose.

Many Westerners who encounter bridewealth practice assume that it is both a cause and a symbol of very low status for women. This is not necessarily the case. John Ogbu (1978) argued that such payments enhance rather than diminish the status of women by enabling both husband and wife to acquire reciprocal rights in each other. Indeed, as the Kipsigis illustrate, the families of higher-status, more educated women demand higher bridewealth. Surveying bridewealth globally, Caroline Jones (2011, p. 105) reported that the practice is complex and variable. She reports that bridewealth, by itself, does not determine female status in society.

Dowry

Dowry—a presentation of goods by the bride's kin to the groom's family—is less common than other forms of exchange at marriage. Like bridewealth, dowry has different meanings and functions in different societies. In some cases, this transfer of wealth represents a woman's share of her family inheritance. It may be used by her and her husband to set up a new household, kept by her as insurance in case her husband dies, or spent by her on her children. In other cases, dowry is a payment transferred from the bride's family to the groom's family.

Dowry has been common in India for hundreds of years, and its functions are much debated. One view is that it may have served as a type of inheritance for women. In a society in which only men inherit family property, women's possession of their dowry gave them an independent source of wealth. There are some critical problems with this idea, however. Most women have no control over their dowries, which remain in the custody of their mother-in-law or their husband. Further, if the purpose of a dowry really was economic security, it would consist of productive resources such as land or a shop rather than the personal and household goods that constitute the main portion of Indian dowries today.

Another theory holds that because upper-class and upper-caste women in India are not supposed to work, dowry compensates the groom's family for taking on an economic burden. Dowry from this standpoint is a compensatory payment from the bride's family, which is losing an economic liability, to the groom's family, which is taking one on (Srinivasen & Lee, 2004).

Although dowry is a practice of great antiquity, its terms were changed under British colonialism and as Indians became increasingly involved in the cash economy. The British imposed heavy taxation and prohibited women from owning property. This led many families to look at dowry as a crucial source of income. Thus, demands for dowry payments increased and families of husbands began demanding additional money from their in-laws at other times such as at the birth of children. Women and their families were sometimes harassed and threatened over these financial demands. In 1961, laws were passed making dowry illegal, and additional laws against dowry have been passed since then. However, these laws have proven extremely ineffective. A study of 40,000 marriages between 1960 and 2008 reported that dowry was paid in 95% of marriages. After accounting for inflation, the amount paid has been stable throughout this time (Anukriti et al., 2021). Families continue to demand dowries and take actions against women and families that are unable to pay the prices to which they have agreed. In extreme cases, women are murdered or driven to suicide when they fail to meet dowry demands. Each year in India, about 8,000 “dowry deaths” are reported (Bundhun, 2017; Seeger, 2013; Figure 11.9). Most of these deaths are reported among the poorest segments of society, but not all. In 2016, a member of the Indian Parliament, his wife, and his son were arrested for the dowry-related death of the son’s wife (“BSP MP,” 2016).

Figure 11.9 Satya Rani Chadha (1929–2014) shows a picture of her daughter Shashi Bala, who was murdered when her family failed to give the full dowry request to her husband's family. Chadha became a women's rights activist and a founder of India's antidowry movement.

Pradeep Gaur/Mint via Getty Images

Globalization is beginning to influence the dowry system in parts of India where lower-class women have begun to work in factory production. In South India, working in garment factories now allows these women to earn salaries that, although generally lower than those of men, are nevertheless becoming essential for family subsistence. In the past, the families of these women amassed dowries for their daughters (even if they had to borrow much of it), but now many of these women are saving for their own dowries. This has led to greater independence for young, unmarried women, who now demand greater rights to choose their mates rather than accepting the matches their families arrange. However, this also disrupts the kin support networks that traditionally accompany those marriages (Lessinger, 2008).

TYPES OF FAMILIES

Three basic types of families identified by anthropologists are the nuclear family, the composite family, and the extended family. Nuclear families are organized around the conjugal tie (the relationship between husband and wife). Composite (compound) families are composed of nuclear families linked by a common spouse, most often the husband. Extended families are based on relations of descent extending over three or more generations.

A domestic group, or household, is not the same as a family. Although households most often contain related people, nonkin may also be part of a household. In addition, members of a family may be spread out over several households. The composition of a household is affected by the cultural rules about where a newly married couple will live.

The Nuclear Family

A **nuclear family** consists of a married couple and their children. It is most often associated with **neolocal residence**, in which the married couple establishes an independent household. This type of family may exist as an isolated and independent unit, or it may be embedded within larger kinship units. Only 5% of the world's societies are neolocal (Baker & Jacobsen, 2007).

The nuclear family is adapted in many ways to the requirements of industrial society. In societies where most jobs do not depend on productive resources that are often owned by family groups (such as land) and in societies where mobility may be required for obtaining employment and career success, a small, flexible unit such as the independent nuclear family has its advantages. Independence and flexibility are also requirements of foraging lifestyles, and more than three quarters of all foraging groups live in nuclear family groups. In such societies, however, the nuclear family is not nearly as independent or isolated as it is in U.S. society. The family unit almost always camps together with the kin of the husband or the wife.

The Changing American Family

In the United States, the monogamous, independent, neolocal nuclear family is a cultural ideal. This is related to the high degree of mobility required in a capitalist system based around industry and information and to a culture that emphasizes romantic love, the emotional bond between husband and wife, privacy, and personal independence. In U.S. society, a newly married couple is expected to occupy their own residence and to function as an independent domestic and economic unit.

Although the nuclear family consisting only of parents and their biological children has played an important role in politics and media, it is not that common in the United States. In 2019, about 62.5% of children lived with both of their biological parents (Anderson et al., 2022). Only about a third of Americans live in this kind of family. David Brooks (2020) notes that the heyday of the nuclear family was between 1950 and 1965. He calls this era “a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired … to obscure the essential fragility” of the nuclear family.

Throughout most of U.S. history, households limited to two parents and their biological offspring have been the exception rather than the rule. U.S. households have frequently included more than two generations and often included relatives other than parents and their biological children as well as nonrelatives. In recent times, high rates of divorce and remarriage as well as technological changes have, to some degree, remade the family. Brooks notes that the nuclear family depended on married women being unable to get well-paying jobs, men being able to earn enough to support a family, and the presence of many other nuclear families that could form a network. None of these conditions lasted. By the 1970s, men’s wages were declining, women were increasingly drawn into the workforce, and society was becoming more individualistic (Figure 11.10).

Figure 11.10 One of the most important changes in the family in the United States over the past 50 years has been the increasing number of women who work outside the home. In most families, women’s domestic responsibilities have not decreased, but in some two-career families, there is a movement toward more equal sharing of domestic work and childcare.

iStockphoto.com/FamVeld

Divorce and remarriage enmesh families in ever-larger and more complicated kinship networks. Sometimes called **blended families**, these networks include divorced spouses and their new marriage partners, children from previous marriages, and multiple sets of grandparents and other relations. Relationships between children and their divorced, noncustodial parents are often extremely limited. For example, when the custody of children is not shared, one third of children see their noncustodial parent once a month or more, one third see them less than that, and the remaining third rarely see their noncustodial parent at all (Gordon & Arbuthnot, 2019).

Another important trend in the United States is the increasing number of children living with unmarried parents. In 1960, only about 9% of children lived with an unmarried parent; by 2017, 32% did. In two thirds of these cases, children lived with a single mother. The overwhelming majority were single-mother households (Livingston, 2018). The United States has the world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households. Other countries that have high rates of single-parent households include the United Kingdom, Russia, and Denmark (Pew Research Center, 2019). More than half the children in the United States spend at least some of their childhood in a single-parent family).

One of the most important trends in U.S. family life is the increasing number of children born to unmarried mothers. Although pregnancy before marriage has always been common in the United States, in the 1930s, only 8% of first births occurred to unmarried women (Bachu, 1999). This figure increased only slightly until 1970, when 11% of children were born outside of marriage. By 2015, the number was over 40%, and most births to women under 30 occurred outside of marriage (Osterman et al., 2022). This is a trend that has not only affected the United States but other wealthy countries as well. For example, in Sweden, most children have been born out of marriage since 1993. By 2015, almost 55% of births were to unmarried mothers (Eurostat, 2015). France and the United Kingdom both have higher rates than the United States (Ventura, 2009). In the past, unmarried mothers giving birth was often considered a particular problem of teenagers. Today, although teenage pregnancy has hardly disappeared, most unmarried mothers are women aged 20 to 30. Although rates of birth to unmarried mothers in the United States are up for all ethnic groups, the rates have risen particularly sharply among Hispanic women and Black women, accounting for 53% and 73% of all births, respectively (Wildsmith et al., 2011).

It is particularly revealing that the one group in the United States that has largely resisted the trend toward single parenthood is college graduates. This suggests the powerful economic forces that are behind these trends. The unskilled or minimally skilled jobs that earned good salaries for men with a high school education or less in much of the 20th century have largely disappeared. They have been replaced with jobs in the service sector that do not require the strength or endurance men brought to manufacturing or other kinds of labor. In fact, the culture men created in assembly-line and construction jobs probably hindered them from getting service-sector jobs (for a now-classic example, see Bourgois, 1995). Women with limited education can find jobs that will support themselves and their children. Given the weak and irregular job prospects for men, marriage may frequently lead to working women supporting husbands as well. Under these circumstances, choosing not to marry makes good economic sense. It is important to note that the decision not to marry is not necessarily a decision to live alone: More than half of the births to unmarried women occur to couples that are cohabiting. However, cohabiting couples usually have very different economic expectations of each other than do married couples. Few cohabiting couples get married, and those who do generally do not stay married for very long (Wildsmith et al., 2011). It is very clear that as a group, single-mother families are far poorer than other families. Seven in 10 children living with a single mother are poor or low income, more than twice as many as children living in other arrangements (Mather, 2010).

The economic situation for college-educated Americans is quite different. Not only are the prospects of getting a job far better for both male and female college graduates, but the income those jobs generate is also far greater than what the uneducated earn. College-educated women can generally support themselves and their children without male assistance, and many choose to do so. However, marriage is a far better economic prospect for them than for the less educated. A family in which both partners have a well-paying job will not only be far more prosperous than in cases where this is not true, but it will also be more economically stable. If one partner loses a job, the other may still have one or be able to find a job with comparative ease. The association of marriage with the educated and prosperous has led sociologist Frank Furstenberg to label marriage a “luxury good” (in Tavernise, 2012). However, this is a bit deceptive. It is not that the wealthy get married for pleasure or to demonstrate their wealth like they might buy a yacht or an expensive piece of jewelry. Rather, those from prosperous backgrounds are more likely to be well educated. For them, marriage is likely to increase their prosperity and stability, further differentiating them from the poor.

Politicians and social commentators have sometimes argued that single-parent families are the cause rather than the result of poverty. They deplore the lack of “family values” that have led to this situation. However, the fact is that limiting and reducing welfare payments, promoting abstinence, and preaching the value of marriage have done nothing to reduce the number of children born out of wedlock. On the contrary, this number has only continued to rise.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Refugees and Families

We live in an era of unprecedented civil violence. Wars, particularly those within states, have made tens of millions of refugees. The number of refugees around the world is steadily rising. In 2021, more than 84 million people became refugees. However, at the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic led to travel restrictions that limited geographical mobility. Conflict remained a key generator of refugees. People fled nations beset by violence in the Central African Republic, Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Eritrea. Three and a half million were displaced as the Taliban took over Afghanistan, and there were unprecedented levels of migration in Central America as people fled from gangs and organized crime (United Nations, 2021). As we write this in early 2023, more than 2.4 million people have fled Ukraine for neighboring countries to the west as the Russian army increasingly targets civilians (Landry, 2022a). It was the fastest refugee exodus of the 21st century (Landry, 2022b) (Figure 11.11).

Figure 11.11 Millions became refugees as Russia invaded Ukraine. Here, Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, a musician, former member of the Ukrainian parliament, and the founder of Voice, a pro-European political party, plays an impromptu concert for refugees at the Lviv railway station in March 2022.

istockphoto.com/Ruslan Lytvyn

Families play a central role in virtually every aspect of the international refugee crisis. Many refugees come from families that have been destroyed by war or other violence. Lila, a young refugee in Canada, said, “My parents and my family, yes, they were affected. They were killed.” Peter, a refugee from Sierra Leone in West Africa, was kidnapped and forced to become a child soldier. Compelled to become an adult overnight, his fellow soldiers became his family. Peter was completely separated from his family for more than 10 years and was only able to find a degree of peace after seeing his mother and gaining some acceptance from her (Blanchet-Cohen & Denov, 2015).

Changes to families and differences in the way family is understood in different cultures present profound challenges to both refugees and the societies that take them in. Who exactly are the members of your family? Carole McGranahan (2015) recounted the case of Tashi, a Tibetan who was granted refugee status in Canada. In the United States and Canada, a refugee may petition for their spouse and children to join them. Tashi did so, but the immigration officials demanded DNA testing of his children. The testing showed that two of the children were not biologically related to him. However, Tashi had been their father since their birth and they knew no other.

Superficially, DNA testing seems to be a reliable scientific way of determining family membership. However, it is flawed because it confuses the biological with the social. In Tibetan society, there are many ways for a man to have children. **Fraternal polyandry**, in which a wife has multiple husbands who are brothers to each other, may play a part. Adoption and stepparenting are both common. In this patrilineal society, unless their biological father claims them, children belong to the family of their mother's husband regardless of their biological parentage. Perhaps most important, as McGranahan has pointed out, families are always about more than genetics. Families are made in different ways in different places, and "care, commitment, shared stories, and social recognition of claimed family status" (McGranahan, 2015) are more important than DNA. As an anthropological consultant, McGranahan unsuccessfully argued these points to Canadian officials. As of 2015, Tashi's family remained at a refugee camp in South Asia.

When children arrive as refugees in new countries, they face extraordinary problems. Sometimes, as in the case of Lila and Peter, they are survivors of profound trauma who arrive without families and who must be integrated into their new societies. Other times, families arrive, but the social connections and networks that helped them survive have been ruptured and adults cannot provide for children's safety and care. Families are further weakened by culture shock.

The tendency in the past has been to treat refugees as individuals with problems. However, anthropology points to better ways of helping them. Natasha Blanchet-Cohen and Myriam Denov (2015) conducted anthropological research among war refugee children in Quebec. They found that for these children, the key to survival was re-creating family and social networks. Children found surrogate families and communities through which they could get aid and support and feel at home. In some cases, these units were composed of other refugees, but they also sometimes included members of the children's host communities and social service workers.

Young people valued the efforts of psychologists and social workers, but they knew these efforts weren't enough. These children were taking active roles in reconstructing the family and social networks of their lives. Blanchet-Cohen and Denov argue that people and governments that want to help refugees need to focus on enabling, guiding, and reinforcing the networks the children create. Anthropological research can help with that. It starts with listening to families and children and taking what they say seriously.

Composite Families

Composite (compound) families are aggregates of nuclear families linked by a common spouse, most often the husband. Composite families are thus mainly patrilocal, structured by rules that require a woman to live in her husband's home after marriage. A polygynous household, consisting of one man with several wives and their respective children, constitutes a composite family. In this case, each wife and her children normally occupy a separate residence. In other words, one way of thinking about a polygynous family is as a series of monogamous families connected by sharing a single husband and father.

The dynamics of composite families are different from those of a family that consists of one husband, one wife, and their children, occupying a common residence. As we saw previously, polygyny produces (and is produced by) wealthy and powerful families. It benefits men and women by increasing their wealth and also frequently benefits women by reducing their workload and increasing their security. However, polygyny creates complex and sometimes problematic family dynamics. For example, in composite families, the ties between mothers and their children tend to be particularly strong. Children spend a lot of time with and usually live in the same structure as their mothers. Mothers tend to defend the rights and promote the positions of their own children. Ties between children and their fathers tend to be weaker. They spend far less time with their fathers and often do not share a dwelling with them. Fathers must balance the rights and positions of all their children. Further, bonds between children who share the same mother tend to be far stronger than between children who have the same father but different mothers. Children who share the same father but have different mothers may tend to show solidarity with each other when they face outsiders but fight with each other when outsiders are not present.

Interactions between co-wives are also an important factor in these families. Jealousy is not an inevitable part of polygynous marriage, but it is fairly common. Husbands ideally try to maintain equity between the different segments of their family. They should be equally sexually active with each wife and should provide equally for each family segment. However, in practice, this is often very difficult. If the family in question has enormous wealth (like members of the Saudi royal family), ensuring that each wife and her children are well provided for is relatively simple. However, most polygynous families live in relative poverty, and making sure that each family segment is provided for equally and adequately is a continuous challenge. Disputes are likely to occur even when all members of the family get along reasonably well.

Extended Families

The **extended family** consists of two or more lineally related kinfolk of the same sex and their spouses and their offspring. Extended families usually occupy a single household or homestead and are under the authority of a household head (Figure 11.12). An extended family is not just a collection of nuclear families. In the extended family system, ties of descent between generations are more important than ties of marriage. Extended families may be patrilineal or matrilineal.

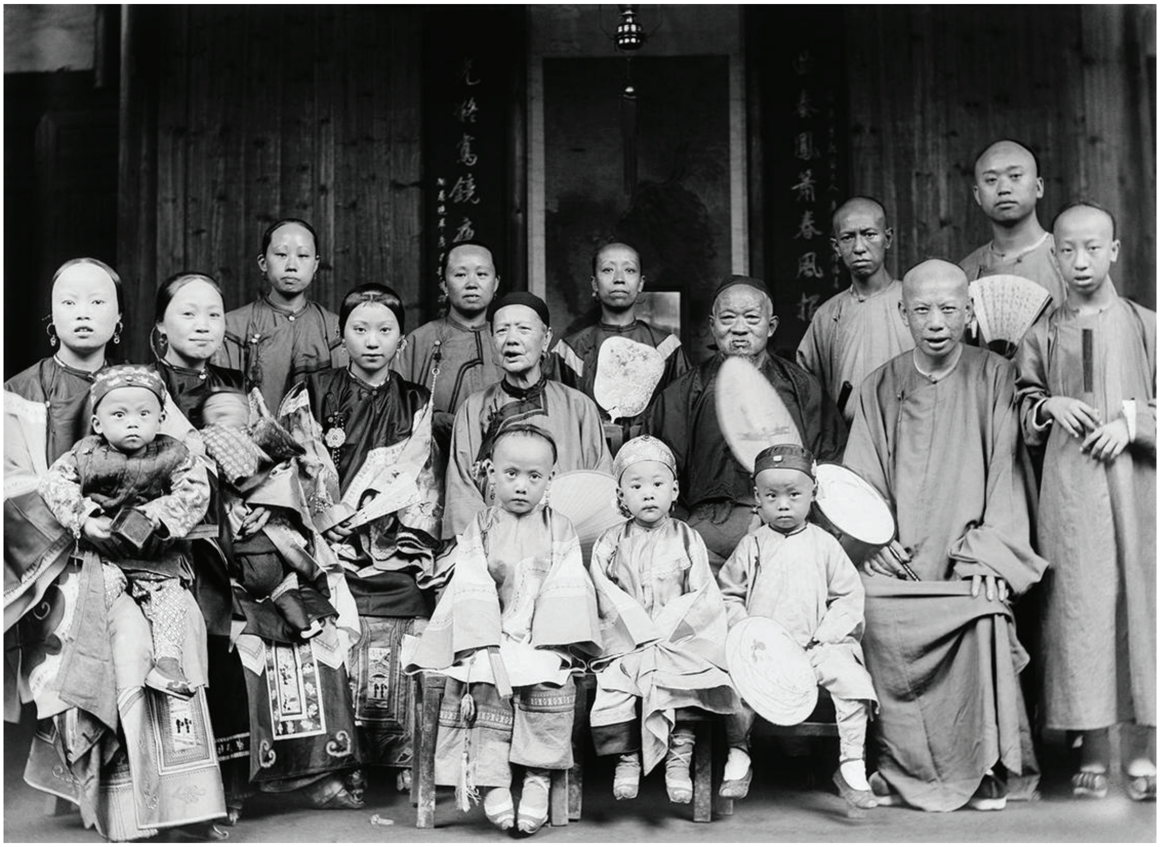


Figure 11.12 In much of Asia, the family is an extended group of kin connected through patrilineal descent. Although this extended kinship group involves an individual having obligations to others, it is also, ideally, a source of lifetime security, social connectedness, and help when needed. Here, three generations of a Chinese family pose for a photograph around 1900.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Extended families prevail in many societies based around agriculture or herding. In these cases, the extended family is usually a corporate group, owning both land and herds. People gain access to productive resources through their family membership. Extended families provide the extensive labor required to work the land or maintain the herds.

The extended family is the ideal in more than half of the world’s societies. However, in stratified societies, even if it is ideal, it is found most often among landowners and prosperous merchants. Less prosperous people more frequently live in smaller domestic units.

Patrilineal, Patrilocal Families

A patrilineal extended family is organized around a man, his sons, and the sons’ wives and children. Societies with patrilineal extended families also tend to have **patrilocal residence** rules; that is, after marriage, a man remains in his father’s household and his wife moves into this household. Thus, patrilineal families consist of generations of brothers and their wives. In this situation, wives are, to some degree, outsiders in their husbands’ families. Men own the land and other productive resources and are responsible for providing for their wives and children.

Patrilineal Families in Premodern China The patrilineal, patrilocal extended family was the ideal family form in premodern China. Lineal descendants—father, son, and grandson—were the backbone of family organization. The family continued through time as an enduring social entity. As older members were lost through death, new ones were added through birth.

Families in China tended to view marriage in terms of acquiring daughters-in-law. Marriages were arranged by parents, and the new couple lived with the husband’s family. The obedient relationship of the son to his father and the loyalty and solidarity of brothers were more important than the ties between husband and wife. Public demonstrations of affection between husbands and wives were severely criticized as it was feared that a husband’s feelings for his wife would interfere with carrying out responsibilities to his siblings and parents.

A good wife was a good daughter-in-law. She had to work hard under the eyes of her mother-in-law and her husband’s elder brothers’ wives. With the birth of a son, a woman gained more acceptance in the household. As the years went by, if she was patient and played her role well, the relationship between husband and wife developed into one of companionship and a more equal division of power. As her sons grew up, the wife achieved even more power as she began to arrange for their marriages. When several sons were married, a woman might be the dominant person in the household, even ordering her husband about as his economic power and, consequently, his authority waned (Ebrey, 1984).

Matrilineal Families

A matrilineal family is organized around descent through women and their daughters and the daughters' husbands and children. Matrilineal families may have **matrilocal residence** rules (a husband lives in the household of his wife's family) or **avunculocal residence** rules (at adolescence, boys leave their parents' household to join the household of their maternal uncles, and when they marry, their wives join them in this household).

In the matrilineal extended family, the most important ties are between mothers and daughters and between siblings. Husbands gain sexual access and some economic rights over their wives, but husbands do not gain control over their children. Children belong to the descent groups of their mothers, not their fathers. In a matrilineal society, the rights and responsibilities of protection, provision, and control fall primarily to the mother's brother. He, along with other male members of his lineage, controls the family property. Thus, women live in, and children grow up in households with husbands and fathers who do not control the family property of their wives and children (the husbands control the property of their sisters, nieces, and nephews). This limits the power of husbands and may increase options for women, decrease cooperation between women and their husbands, reduce domestic violence, and result in better health and education outcomes for children (Lowes, 2017).

Matrilineal Families Among the Hopi The Hopi, a Pueblo group in the U.S. Southwest, are a matrilineal society (Figure 11.13). The matrilineage is conceived of as timeless, stretching back to the beginnings of the Hopi people.

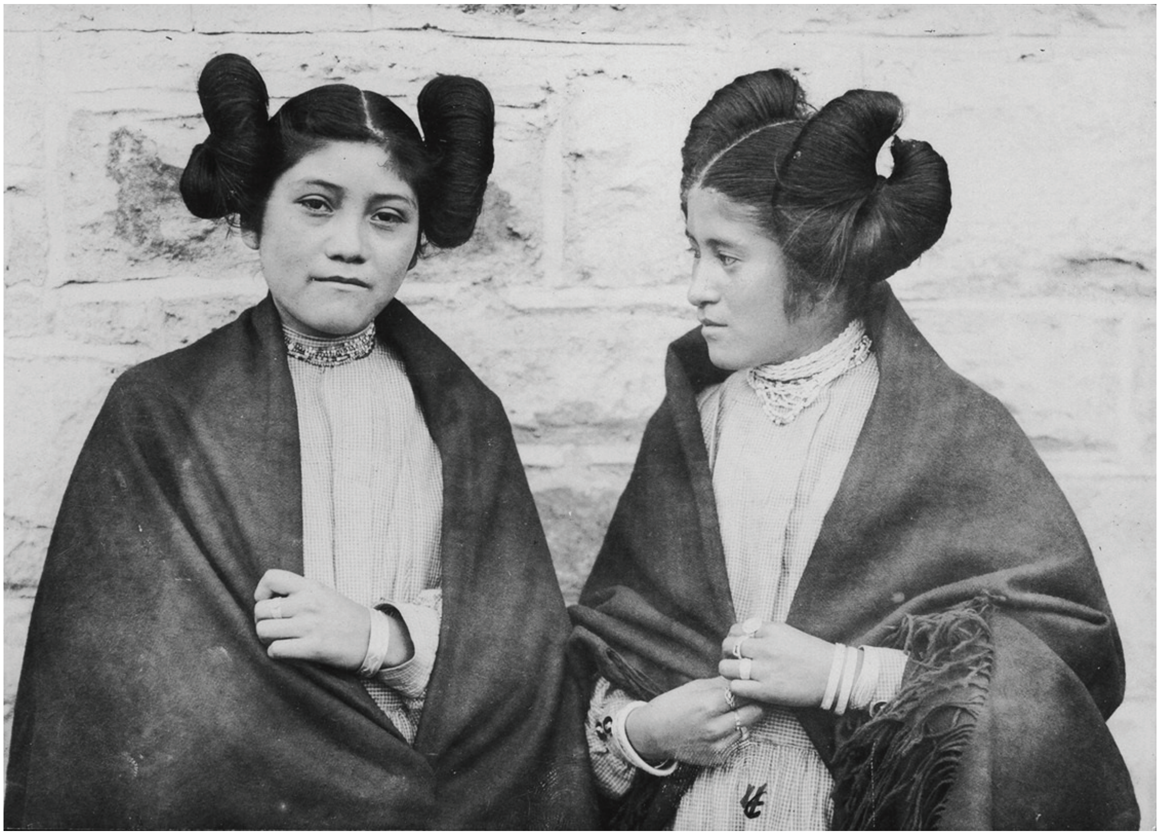


Figure 11.13 The Hopi are a matrilineal group in the U.S. Southwest. Here two young Hopi girls are shown in a photo taken in 1906. Their “squash blossom” or “butterfly whorl” hairstyles indicate that they are eligible to marry. For the Hopi, squash blossoms are symbolic of fertility. Married women generally wear their hair in a single braid.

Oklahoma Historical Society/Getty Images

The Hopi household revolves around a central and continuing core of women. The mother–daughter relationship is exceedingly close, based on descent, common activities, and lifelong residence together. Mothers are responsible for the economic and ritual training of their daughters. Daughters are expected to behave with respect, obedience, and affection to their mothers, and daughters normally live with their mothers and mothers' sisters after marriage. Sons belong to their mothers' lineage and keep much of their personal and ritual property in their homes. However, sons move to their wives' homes after marriage. Sons are expected to show respect for their mothers, the heads of their households, and consult them on all important decisions. Men return to their natal homes for many ritual and ceremonial occasions and in the case of separation or divorce. Men have affectionate relationships with members of their fathers' lineages. Such relationships involve some economic and ritual obligations but little direct cooperation or authority.

The strongest and most permanent tie in Hopi society is between sisters. The foundation of the household group is the relation of sisters to one another and to their mother. The children of sisters are raised together; if one sister dies, another sister looks after her children. Sisters cooperate in all domestic tasks. There are usually few quarrels, and when they occur, they are settled by the mother's brother or the sisters' own brothers.

As in all matrilineal societies, a man's relationship with his sisters' sons is very important. As head of his sisters' lineage and household, a Hopi man is in a position of authority and control. He is the chief disciplinarian and has the primary responsibility for the important task of transmitting the ritual heritage of the lineage and clan. He is consulted in the choice of a spouse, instructs his nephews in the proper behavior toward their new relatives, and formally welcomes his nieces' husbands into the household. A man usually selects his most capable nephew as his successor and trains him in the duties of whatever ceremonial position he may hold.

Since men's primary responsibilities are to their sisters and sisters' children, their roles in their wives' families are less central. They have important economic functions but do not participate in the matrilineage ritual.

Whereas a boy's relationship with his maternal uncle is characterized by reserve, respect, and even fear, his relationship with his father is more affectionate and involves little discipline. Hopi fathers give their sons miniature bows and arrows to prepare them for hunting and warfare. A Hopi father's obligations to his sons are primarily economic. He prepares them to make a living by teaching them to farm and herd sheep. At his son's marriage, a father often presents him with a portion of the flock and a small piece of land. The economic support sons receive from their father is returned in the father's old age, when his sons support him.

A Hopi father's relationship with his daughters is affectionate and friendly. He gives his daughters kachina dolls that are associated with abundance and fertility. The gifting of bows and arrows to sons ends with puberty, but the giving of kachina dolls continues. This symbolizes the father's protection of the daughter but also his role as guardian of his daughter's fertility (Schlegel, 2008, pp. 132–133).

In addition to matrilineages, the Hopi also have matrilineal clans that extend over many different villages. A Hopi man must not marry within his own clan or the clan of his father or his mother's father. Through marriage, a Hopi man acquires a wide range of relatives in addition to those resulting from his membership in his mother's clan. Kinship terms are extended to all these people, leading to a vast number of potential sibling relationships and the lateral integration of a great number of separate lineages and clans. This extension of kinship relates a Hopi in some way to almost everyone in their village, to people in other villages, and even to people in other Pueblo groups who have similar clans. In the clans, men play important political and religious roles, in contrast to the marginal positions they have in domestic life (Eggan, 1950).

Conclusion: The Global Family

Throughout the world, family structures have faced challenges from increased globalization, governmental policies, and new technologies. Extended family structures were well adapted to agrarian and herding societies, and nuclear families were well adapted to both foraging societies and to the industrial societies of the mid-20th century.

However, in the past half century, all of these societies have changed enormously. Population increase, the spread of global capitalism, and urbanization have changed the nature of the family. In 1800, only 3% of the world's population lived in cities. Today, over half do, and projections show that by 2050, almost 70% will (United Nations, 2018). As populations have urbanized, people are increasingly employed in industry, information, and service sectors. The movement to an urban, postindustrial economy has affected families throughout the world. It has led to an increase in the prevalence of small families focused around one or two adults and their children.

In many places, women have entered the paid workforce and play major roles in both manufacturing and service industries. In many places, as in the United States, this has pushed the value of marriage down. People marry much later than they once did if they marry at all. In Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, the average age for marriage is now 29 to 30 for women and 31 to 33 for men. In 2015, 40.7% of women and 50.8% of men between 18 and 39 were unmarried. These numbers have increased steadily since 1992. About a third of Japanese men and women aged 18 to 24 said they were single and not interested in a relationship (Ghaznavi et al., 2020).

Not only is marriage decreasing, but so is childbearing. For a population to hold steady, women must, on average, have 2.1 children. If women have fewer children than that and immigration doesn't occur, the population will decline. As Table 11.1 shows, in many wealthy nations, women are having fewer children than the population replacement rate. Across the world, the total number of births per woman has declined from more than 5.5 in 1964 to 2.4 in 2019.

Table 11.1 Low Fertility Chart

Nation	Fertility Rate in 2015 (children per woman)	Fertility Rate in 2020 (children per woman)
Republic of Korea	1.2	0.8

Hong Kong SAR, China	1.2	0.9
Singapore	1.2	1.1
Spain	1.3	1.2
Japan	1.5	1.3
United Kingdom	1.8	1.6
United States	1.8	1.6

In societies based around agricultural labor or herding, children are a good economic investment. The cost of raising children is relatively low, and they provide a strong economic boost to the family. Only a shrinking percentage of the world's population is engaged in these activities, however. In urban settings and in an information and service economy, economic benefits go to those who have technical training. The costs of raising and educating children become very high, and the economic benefit of children to their families lessens. In the United States, for example, for a child born in 2015, a middle-income family will spend almost $300,000 (including inflation) to raise a child from birth to age 18. That does not include any college expenses (Lino, 2020). Costs in other wealthy countries are comparable. Families in wealthy nations derive many benefits from their children, but these are only rarely economic.

In poor nations, high child mortality, the relatively high percentage of the population involved in agriculture, and the lower costs of raising children lead to increased fertility. However, even in these places, fertility is declining, particularly in cities (Table 11.2). Costs of raising children in poor nations are lower, but in the urban areas in which people increasingly live, costs are still high, and this has driven family size down dramatically. A study of eight West African countries showed that rural women had, on average, 6.47 children, while urban women had only 4.9. The effect was biggest in cities over 1 million, where women had an average of 3.44 children, a bit above half the number that rural women had (Corker, 2014, p. 119).

Table 11.2 High Fertility Chart

Nation	**Fertility Rate in 2015 (children per woman)**	**Fertility Rate in 2020 (children per woman)**
Niger	7.3	6.7
Burkina Faso	5.4	5
Afghanistan	4.8	4.2
Ghana	4.0	3.8
Pakistan	3.5	3.4
Bolivia	2.9	2.7
Turkey	2.1	2

In addition to these trends, government policies and technological changes have also affected families. Since the late 1970s, China has used a variety of incentives and punishments to encourage families to have only a single child (see Chapter 15). Although China's is the best-known policy, many other countries have also strongly promoted family planning. In countries such as China and India, where male children are more prestigious than female children, the combination of policies promoting family planning, the high cost of childrearing, and the increasing availability of ultrasound technology that allows people to determine the sex of their unborn children have resulted in many more boys than girls being born. In China in 2004, for example, 121.2 boys were born for every 100 girls. This figure had declined and stood at 113.5 in 2015 (Zhou, 2016). The bias toward male children isn't unique to China and India. Some of the world's most highly skewed birth rates are found in Liechtenstein in Europe and on the Caribbean island of Curacao (Eveleth, 2013).

It is clear that the trends of economic, political, and technological changes that characterize our world will have profound effects on the shape that families take in the future. However, it is anything but clear what shape these families will take. For example, if the economic value of marriage and children continues to decline, will two-parent families all but disappear? If the ratio of boys to girls climbs higher and higher, will girls become more culturally valued because of their scarcity? No one knows the answers to these and many other questions about the family. However, culture gives humanity the ability to create and adapt to an extraordinarily broad spectrum of environmental, economic, and political circumstances. A brave new world may be coming for families everywhere, but we will surely devise new cultural forms to go with it.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

Aging is a universal, biological aspect of being human that must be understood within a cultural context. Throughout the world, the number of elders is rising, and people over 65 are the fastest-growing segment of the global population (Gladstone, 2019).

Every society must make decisions about who will care for the aged. With the advent of modern medicine, particularly in wealthy Western nations, old age has become associated with a long dying process and such potentially incapacitating diseases as hypertension, cancer, coronary heart disease, and Alzheimer’s. Interestingly, illness and life expectancy appear to be related to gender in all societies. Men generally have better health and higher functional status as they age, though they have lower life expectancy. Women live longer than men but experience more chronic illness, disability, Alzheimer’s disease, and institutionalization and require more medical care than men. These differences are not easily explained.

One result of the increasing number of elderly is the emergence of many forms of institutionalized care, such as assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and in-home care (Nanda & Gregg, 2011). Even in modernized societies with extended family systems, like India and China, where tradition requires the aged to be cared for at home, outside home care for elders has expanded (Lamb, 2009).

In China, as young people migrate to cities, the traditional obligations for a son to provide for his parents in their old age are breaking down

(Jacobs & Century, 2012). Indeed, girls may now be favored over boys as they are emotionally closer to their families and undertake eldercare obligations more assiduously (Greenhalgh, 2007). In some Chinese cities, the names of children who neglect their elderly parents are posted on community bulletin boards to shame them, and in other cases, local homes for the elderly fine children who miss weekend parental visits (Serrano Saltman & Yeh, 2017).

In societies like Japan, where integration and group harmony are valued over competitive independence, the elderly are frequently anxious about becoming a burden to their children and about their inability to return the obligations they incur toward family members who care for them. With Japan’s smaller families, new death rituals have been constructed so that those left behind will be less burdened by elaborate—and expensive—mortuary rites (Kawano, 2010).

American Muslims are also finding that modern life may conflict with the Koranic precept of caring for one’s elderly relatives at home. For many American Muslims, nursing homes are unthinkable, but often there are no other options. There have been several attempts to establish Muslim nursing homes, but, as of this writing, only one, in San Gabriel, is currently operating in the United States (masjidgibrael.org; Alfarah et al., 2012; Clemetson, 2006). Organizations such as the Chicago Muslim Medical Alliance and the American Muslim Senior Society have worked to provide services and nursing home alternatives for Muslim seniors (Figure 11.14). Muslims in other majority non-Muslim nations have similar difficulties.

Figure 11.14 Organizations such as the Chicago Muslim Medical Alliance and the American Muslim Senior society have worked to provide services and nursing home alternatives for Muslim seniors. Here a woman helps an elder with her walker.

iStockphoto.com/Ergin Yalcin

In the United States, the importance of independence as a cultural value and the anxiety surrounding the idea that one might become a burden help explain the increasing numbers of elderly people who prefer to live alone if financially able to do so. This varies by gender: Elderly widowed or divorced males are twice as interested in dating and remarriage as elderly women (Klinenberg, 2012). This may be because men die earlier, and older women would not look forward to the caring involved in marriage. Love and sex among older people are indeed increasing, but in-depth interviews with older women in the United States indicated that few were inclined to discuss sexuality and aging (Joans, 2013). And in many Asian countries, it is considered shameful to think of older or even middle-aged women as being interested in sex.

In the United States, it is women who mainly bear the brunt of their parents’ care (Porter, 2019). For the increasing number of women who are working professionals, the burden of elder care is becoming more difficult. As in other aspects of family structure, economics, culture, public policy, and personal family factors all play a role in who cares for the elderly.

SUMMARY

1. What are the major functions of marriage and the family? Three major functions of marriage and the family are regulating sexual access between males and females, arranging for the exchange of services between males and females, and assigning responsibility for childcare.
2. How do the Na of China and other cross-cultural examples raise questions about the universality of marriage? Although marriage and family are grounded in the biological process of reproduction, there is great variety in the forms and functions of families. The Na do not traditionally practice marriage, and children remain in their mother’s household throughout their life. Groups such as the Na raise the question of whether marriage is universal and whether procreation is a universal function of the family. Same-sex marriages in some African cultures and in the United States raise similar questions.
3. What is an incest taboo? What are some theories of why incest taboos are universal? Incest taboos are prohibitions on mating between certain groups of relatives. Biological theories of incest argue that inbreeding is deleterious to the species. Psychological theories argue that incest would cause family disruption. Sociological theories argue that the alliances created by marriage to members of other groups are beneficial to survival. No single theory offers an adequate explanation.
4. What is the difference between exogamy and endogamy? How do

these rules function in different cultural contexts? Exogamy requires that people marry outside their group. This rule is adaptive in forging alliances between families within a society. Endogamy requires marriage within a specified group. Its function may be to maintain group status and keep wealth within the group.

5. What are cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages and what are their effects? Cross-cousin marriage unites an individual with a child of their mother’s brother or father’s sister. These unions reinforce ties between kin groups established in the preceding generation. Parallel-cousin marriage unites an individual with a child of their mother’s sister or father’s brother. This helps prevent the fragmentation of family property and strengthens solidarity between brothers.
6. What are the levirate and sororate? In a levirate, a wife is “inherited” by her deceased husband’s younger brother. In a sororate, a deceased wife is replaced by her younger sister. Both attest to marriage as an alliance between groups and allow the continuation of the marriage contract even if one partner dies.
7. What are polygyny and polyandry, and what are their principal correlates? Polygyny occurs when a husband has more than one wife. It is usually found in herding, agricultural, and horticultural societies, cases in which having many children is particularly valuable, but it also occurs in some foraging societies. Polyandry is much rarer and occurs when a wife has more than one husband. It tends to happen in societies where living conditions are particularly harsh or where men must be away from home for long periods of time.
8. What are bride service, bridewealth, and dowry? Bride service, bridewealth, and dowry are exchanges of goods and services that accompany marriage. In bride service, grooms work for the family of the bride for an agreed-upon period. In bridewealth, the family of the husband gives goods, livestock, and sometimes money to the family of the bride. In dowry, the family of the bride gives money and property to the family of the groom or the new couple.
9. How have families been affected by war and violence? Through the end of 2016, violence had displaced more than 65 million

people, and 22 million of these had sought refuge in another country. Wars break families, killing members and destroying social networks. Refugees may be unable to reunite their families because authorities rely on biological models of family. Child refugees attempt to re-create family and social networks in new settings. Anthropologists can help by encouraging authorities to focus on the social networks of refugees and away from treating refugees as individuals with pathologies.

10. What are the differences between nuclear, composite, and extended families? How is each type of family structure related to economic factors? The nuclear family is organized around the tie between husband and wife and is found predominantly in industrial and foraging societies. It is adaptive where geographical mobility is important. Composite families are created by polygyny or polyandry. They are composed of different family subunits linked by a common spouse. The extended family joins multiple generations of kinfolk along descent lines through either husband or wife. Composite and extended families are more common in agricultural societies where large families create wealth.
11. How have families changed in the United States in the past half century? American ideology often stresses the importance of the neolocal, independent, nuclear, monogamous family. However, this form is challenged by the many people who choose not to marry, the high divorce rate among those that do marry, the increasing number of single-parent (especially single-mother) families, and the increasing presence of women in the labor market.
12. How do patrilineal patrilocal families differ from matrilineal families? In patrilocal patrilocal families, wives live with their husbands’ families and fathers are the heads of their families and lineages. In matrilineal families, husbands usually live with their wives’ families but are the heads of their sisters’ lineage and families.
13. How has globalization changed the family? Globalization has led to increasing levels of urbanization and rising expenses of childrearing. This has favored increasing the prevalence of small families focused around one or two adults and their children and

has been accompanied by declining fertility, especially in wealthy nations.

14. Describe variation in the treatment of the elderly in different cultures. Studies of wealthy nations have shown that older people are more likely than young adults to describe themselves as very happy, but they have also revealed that loneliness increases with age. In traditional societies, the treatment of the elderly varies. The old may be respected, but caring for them is often treated as a burden. The elderly are sometimes anxious about becoming burdens on their families.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Anthropologist Philip Kilbride (1994) has suggested that polygyny would be a good marriage arrangement in the modern world, and anthropologist Yehudi Cohen (1978) has suggested that the incest taboo is obsolete. Can you argue for or against these two positions?
2. To what degrees are endogamy and exogamy practiced within American society? What kinds of groups are endogamous and exogamous?
3. The past half century has seen dramatic changes in families in the United States. List some of the changes, tell whether you think they will continue in the future, and speculate on the cultural changes that you think may result.
4. Explain the ways in which relations in a polygynous family between siblings who share the same mother and father are likely to be different than relations between siblings that share the same father but have different mothers.
5. Describe some of the ways that globalization has affected families and predict how families might change in the next 25 years.

Key Terms

arranged marriage (p. 302)

avunculocal residence (p. 324)

blended families (p. 319)

bride service (p. 314)

bridewealth (p. 314)

composite (compound) family (p. 322)

dowry (p. 316)

endogamy (p. 307)

exogamy (p. 306)

extended family (p. 322)

fraternal polyandry (p. 321)

incest taboos (p. 305)

levirate (p. 309)

marriage (p. 300)

matrilocal residence (p. 324)

monogamy (p. 310)

neolocal residence (p. 318)

nuclear family (p. 318)

patrilocal residence (p. 323)

polyandry (p. 310)

polygamy (p. 310)

polygyny (p. 310)

sororal polygyny (p. 311)

sororate (p. 309)

1. Data from Table H1 Households by type and tenure of householder for selected characteristics: 2021. Available at: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/families/cps-2021.html

2. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/174.pdf

3. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70/nvsr70-17.pdf

4. https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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At the top right of the map a globe with China marked and labeled is depicted. Yunnan Province with Lugu Lake and the surrounding areas shaded differently is marked in the map. Beijing is marked with a star in the map. Tianjin, Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, Changsha, Fuzhou, Shenzhen, Nanning, Chongqing, Chengdu, and Xi’an are marked and labeled in the map with small circles. Mongolia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and South China Sea are also marked and labeled.

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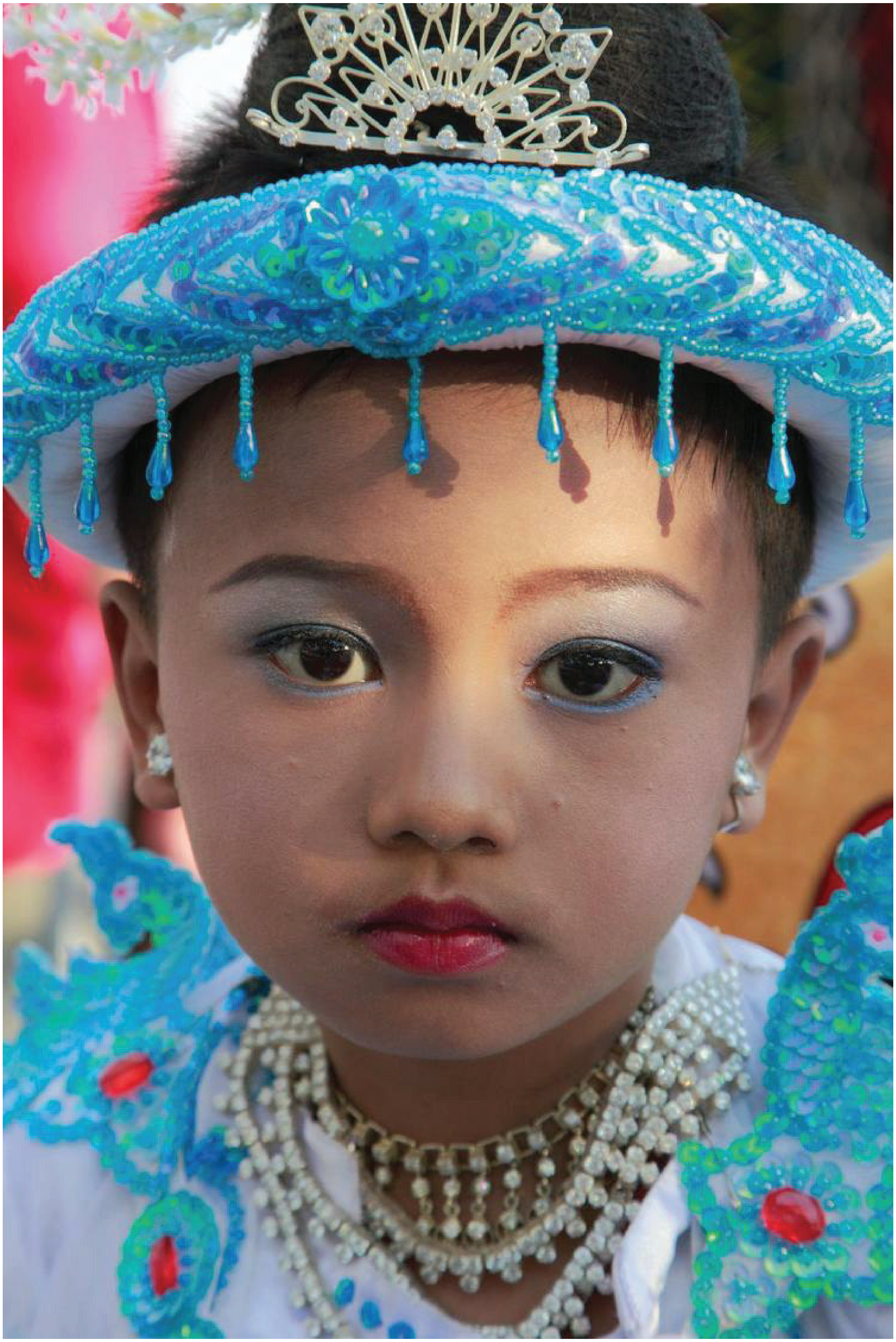
Offspring from father’s brother and mother’ sister is “Ego.” Offspring from father’s sister and father’s brother are “Ego’s cross-cousins.” Offspring of father’s brother are “Ego’s parallel cousins.” Offspring of mother’s sister are “Ego’s parallel cousins.” Offspring of mother’s brother are “Ego’s cross-cousins.”

12 GENDER



There is enormous variation in behavior and dress considered masculine or feminine. Here a young boy in Myanmar is dressed for the Hsinbyu Pwe, a ceremony that initiates him as a Buddhist novice. Many boys in Myanmar spend some time as novice monks, but most return to their families after a few months.

Tibor Bognar/Alamy Stock Photo

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between sex, gender, and sexuality, and illustrate how gender is culturally constructed.
2. Analyze the role of ideology in the construction of gender, including how female sexuality is controlled and men prove themselves.
3. Describe variability in gender roles and sexual behavior.
4. Summarize different theories offered to explain the existence of gender hierarchies.
5. Compare and contrast the gender relations typical of foraging, horticultural, pastoral, and agricultural societies.
6. Assess the changes in our understanding of gender in the past decades and relate them to changes in family and economy.
7. Analyze the relationship between women’s rights, culture, and national prosperity.

Research on gender has a long history in anthropology. The French anthropologist Madeline Pelletier (1874–1939) worked on women’s position in Europe and combated ideas of female inferiority (Sowerwine, 2006). In the United States, Elsie Clews Parsons (1875–

1941) considered male dominance. She explored the ways that social categories created barriers and the potential for breaking through them (Lamphere, 1989). Margaret Mead (1901–1978) was one of the first anthropologists to think carefully about the relationship between biology and masculine or feminine behavior (Figure 12.1). Mead was one of the most famous anthropologists of the 20th century. She was the author of *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928/1971), which was perhaps the first anthropological best-seller, and examined teenage psychology and sexuality in the South Pacific. She was a media celebrity who appeared on television shows and wrote columns for magazines. Mead organized much of her ethnographic research around the question of whether characteristics that Americans in her era thought of as masculine and feminine were universal.

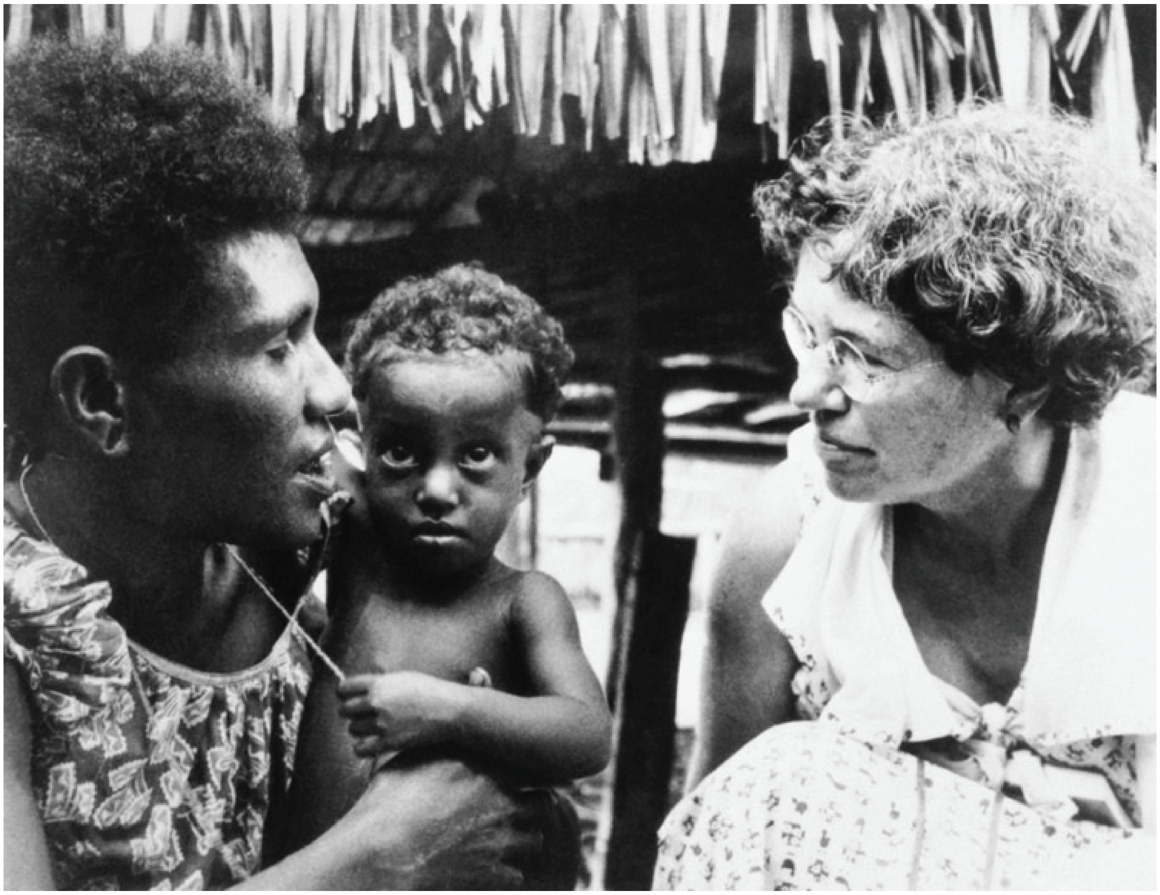


Figure 12.1 Margaret Mead was a pioneering researcher on gender and sexuality. In this 1953 picture, she visits a

mother and child on Manus, a Pacific island near Papua New Guinea.

Bettmann/Getty Images

In one project, Mead considered three groups in New Guinea—the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli (Mead, 1935/1963). She reported that among the Arapesh, men and women were expected to act in ways that Americans of her era considered feminine. Both sexes were concerned with taking care of children and nurturing, and neither sex was expected to be aggressive. In Mundugumor society, both sexes were what American culture would call “masculine”: aggressive, violent, and with little interest in children. And among the Tchambuli, traditional American notions of masculine and feminine were, to some degree, reversed. Women had the more important economic role and were noted for common sense and business shrewdness. Men were more interested in aesthetics. They spent much time decorating themselves and gossiping. Their feelings were easily hurt, and they sulked a lot. From this study, Mead concluded that although many of the behaviors, emotions, and roles that go into being masculine and feminine may have biological roots, they are patterned by culture.

Mead’s work is significant because it reinforces a central anthropological thesis: To grasp the potential and limits of diversity, we must look at the full range of human societies, particularly those outside Western historical, cultural, and economic traditions. In nonindustrial, small-scale, kinship-based, more egalitarian societies, gender relationships differ from our own. Indeed, research on gender diversity indicates that the construction of sex and gender is extraordinarily diverse, as are the relationships between sex, gender, and other aspects of culture.

SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

To begin, it is extremely useful to differentiate between sex, sexuality, and gender. **Sex** is the term used to describe the biological differences between males and females, particularly the visible differences in external genitalia and the role each sex plays in the reproductive process. Overwhelmingly, people are born with either male or female genitalia. However, somewhere between 1 in 2,000 and 1 in 4,500 are born with genitals that are not easily classified as either male or female (Witchel, 2018). Thus, people with ambiguous genitalia make up about 0.02% to 0.05% of the world's population. That's a small number … but it's a big world. Of the U.S. population of 328 million, as many as a quarter million **intersex** people may have genitalia or other biological traits that cannot be easily classified as male or female, including internal and invisible ones.".

Sexuality is difficult to define. However, for our purposes, it refers to sexual desire. Sigmund Freud proposed that children are all "polymorphously perverse," by which he meant that they can experience pleasure through every surface of their bodies (Bordo, 2015, p. 233). This seems to be true of adults as well. People in every society may desire physical contact and sex with all manner of others. Sexual desire may vary depending on age, social conditions, and other factors. Whether people are inclined to be attracted to members of their own or the other sex seems to be biologically determined. However, whether they express that attraction and how they do so is molded by culture.

Gender is the term for the sex- and sexuality-related cultural and social roles that groups and individuals play. It is a social, cultural, and psychological construct that society superimposes on the biological differences of sex and temperament (Worthman, 1995, p. 598). Gender is a type of performance. It is the way we enact our biological sex and our biopsychological sexuality. However, it is a performance that is channeled by the social ideas and specific roles available in society.

Every culture recognizes a variety of **gender roles**. However, cultures have different numbers of named roles. These roles differ in the meanings people attach to them, the supposed sources of the differences between them, and the relationship of these categories to other cultural and social facts. All cultures recognize at least two sexes (male and female) and two genders (masculine and feminine), but some cultures recognize additional sexes and genders. For example, among the Bugis, an ethnic group with a population of about 6 million in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, five genders are recognized: male, female, *calalai* (biological woman but living as a man), *calabai* (biological man but living as a woman), and *bissu* (priests embodying equal elements of male and female). The Bugis believe that all five must be present for harmony to exist in the world (Davies, 2007).

Anthropology emphasizes the central role of gender relations as a basic building block of culture and society (Yanagisako & Collier, 1994). Gender is central to social relations of power, individual and group identities, and the formation of kinship and other groups, as well as meaning and value.

The Cultural Construction of Gender

Except for a few thinkers like Mead, the idea that maleness and femaleness were biologically determined prevailed in the social sciences until the 1970s. Given this assumption, the different roles, behaviors, personality characteristics, emotions, and development of men and women were viewed as a function of sex differences and thus universal. This meant that many important questions about the role of gender in culture and society were never asked. The emergence of feminist anthropology in the 1970s focused attention on cross-cultural variability in the meaning of gender. Biological determinism began to give way to understanding gender as established by social norms and values rather than by biology.

Most anthropologists now understand genders as cultural constructions. The traits considered masculine or feminine have some basis in biology but are molded by cultural forces. They are related to the specific history of each culture but also to the distribution of power within each society and how its members earn their livelihood. For example, as we saw in Chapter 6, moving from agriculture and craft production to industrial production involved a change in the way people in the United States and Western Europe viewed masculinity.

Because learning gender starts so early in people’s lives and is so pervasive, people often mistake the cultural for the natural. They believe that the ways that members of their culture express masculinity, femininity, and other gender roles reflect the way that people naturally are. However, gender roles are learned and channeled by culture.

Consider American childrearing behavior. From the moment that parents learn the sex of their child, often months before the child is born, many of them begin to prepare to teach the child about its gender role. If parents are fortunate enough to have a room set aside for the child, they will often begin to decorate it. Boys get rooms decorated in primary colors with sports, science, or transportation themes. Girls get rooms decorated in pastel colors with flowers, cute animals, or fairy-tale themes (Figure 12.2). Not all parents do this, and there is nothing wrong with decorating your child’s room this way. But these choices help teach children what kind of colors, objects, behaviors, and professions are appropriate for them.

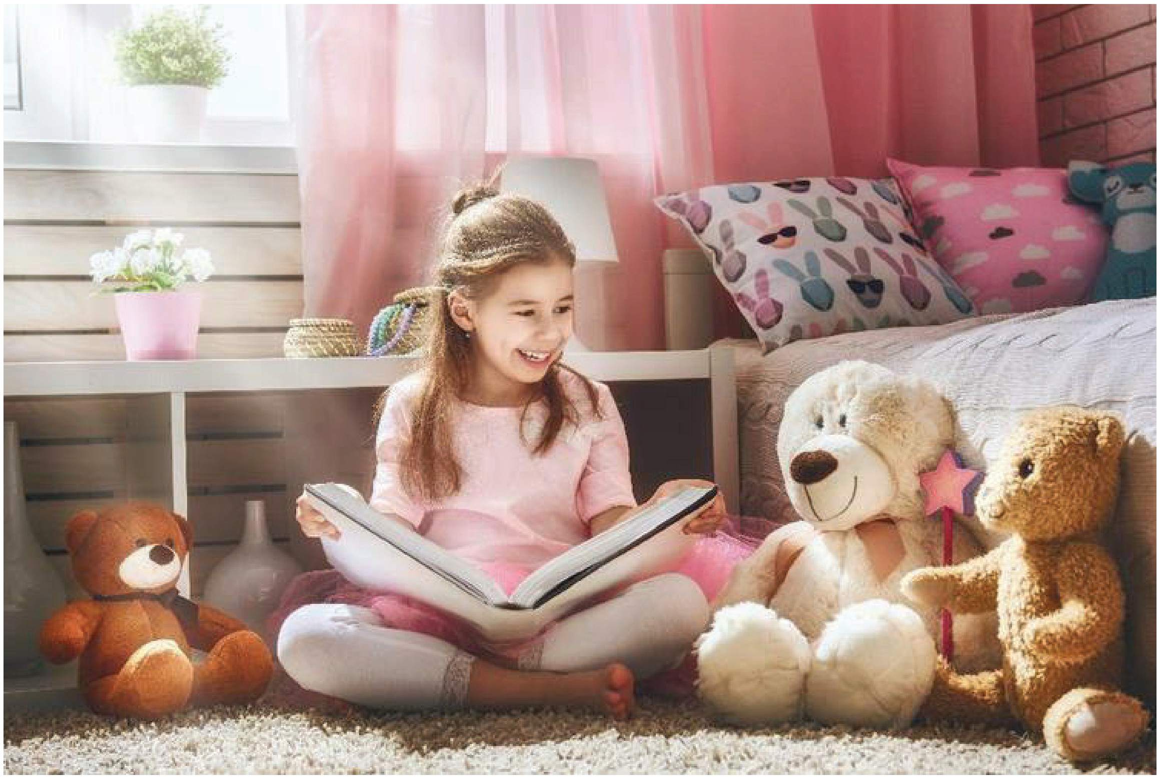


Figure 12.2 We begin to learn what sorts of colors, objects, and ideas are appropriate to our gender as young children. Here a girl, surrounded by pinks and pastels, reads to her stuffed animals.

iStockphoto.com/Choreograph

Learning gender continues as children grow. Parents, teachers, and, most important, children’s peers monitor, police, and channel their behavior. Children (and adults) are given almost continual feedback on their gender performance. They are told “boys do this” (play baseball, for example), and “boys don’t do this” (cry or tell on others). They are told “girls do this” (dance, wear dresses), and “girls don’t do this” (play rough sports, use profane language). In our own culture, stories, movies, advertisements, and many other things reinforce these messages. Other cultures have similar features.

People differ greatly in the degree to which they can or desire to fit the dominant gender roles in their society. In some societies, like the

Bugis, there are alternate gender roles available. However, in societies having only male and female gender roles, people may understand themselves, both positively and negatively, by the degree to which they can perform their gender roles to match their society's expectations. Even in a society that offers many possibilities for the expression of gender, some people may not be easily “legible”; their performance of gender may not fit into socially established roles. For example, David Valentine (2003) did research on transgender individuals in New York City. He found that members of the lesbian, straight, and gay communities had difficulty understanding how to respond to them. None of the ways that outsiders attempted to classify transgender individuals captured the experience of their community.

A culture's construction of gender always includes reference to the differences between male and female sexuality. Such understandings are often used to support sexual ideologies that intersect with cultural constructions of race, class, and other forms of social hierarchy. People are not only members of their gender. Rather, they live at the intersection of many different identities. They are, for example, male, Black, gay, urban, middle class, and college educated or female, straight, rural, poor, and with a GED. All of these identities can be critical in understanding how people experience themselves and how they interact in society.

GENDER IDEOLOGIES: FEMALE SEXUALITY AND MALE PRESTIGE BEHAVIOR

A **gender ideology** is the totality of ideas about sex, sexuality, and gender held by members of a culture. Gender ideologies are ideas, usually stereotypes, about the abilities, characters, and proper roles of different genders. Gender ideologies are linked to social stratification and justify the distribution of power between members of different genders. For example, in Elliott Erwitt's documentary film *Beauty Knows No Pain* (1972), Gussie Nell Davis (1906–1993) says, “Beautiful girls never have any pain with anything that makes them beautiful…. When a Rangerette goes in to get a job from somebody, if they find out she’s a Rangerette, she will always get the job because they know she will always look well-groomed.” Davis was the founder and director of the Kilgore Rangerettes, a revolutionary precision dance team that began in 1940 at Kilgore College in Texas. In the quotation, Davis expresses beliefs about how women should behave and what they should do in society. They should be effortlessly desirable to men and, if they work, should do so in positions in which their employers’ primary concern will be how they look. In the early 1970s, when Davis said this, she was probably expressing part of the dominant gender ideology in the United States.

Gender ideologies are articulated in societies in many ways. They are shown in classrooms, in games, in rituals, in dress, and in how men and women are portrayed in myths and stories. For example, Sherry Ortner (2006) has examined the way women are portrayed in the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales. She notes that women who take active roles and have goals of their own are inevitably wicked. These tales feature wicked witches and evil stepmothers who have antisocial goals and use evil means such as poison, gossip, and magic to carry them out. Girls often play heroic roles in these stories, but they do so first as victims. They only become active because bad things happen to them. Frequently, their heroism is linked to their passivity.

The story “The Six Swans” is typical. An evil witch forces a king to marry her equally evil daughter. The king has six sons and one daughter from a previous marriage. Knowing that his new wife is evil, he hides them from her. But she finds them and turns the sons into swans. To save her brothers, the daughter is forced to remain silent for 6 years while she sews six shirts from flowers. While she is engaged in this task, another king falls in love with her and marries her. She has three children with the king. However, her new mother-in-law conspires against her by stealing her children and then accusing her of cannibalism. The wife is set to be burned at the stake, but, as she is about to be executed, six swans fly overhead. She throws the now completed shirts over them and they transform into her brothers. She can now speak against her mother-in-law, who is burned to death in her stead. In this story, the women who have active plans (marry her daughter to the king, discredit her daughter-in-law) are evil. The heroine acts only because something has happened (her brothers are turned into swans), and her action is actually inaction (she must remain completely silent and sew). It is her inaction that saves her brothers and proves her value.

Controlling Female Sexuality

Gender ideologies often associate specific forms of male performance with power and justify control of female sexuality. Such control is often linked to notions of honor and shame (Gilmore, 1996; Wikan, 2008). In some cases, the belief that women are more sexually voracious than men is used to justify men's control over women. However, even where this is not the case, most societies exercise far greater control over women than men. Frequently, this includes cultural practices such as the seclusion of women, control over women's dress, laws that favor men in marriage and divorce, and laws regarding adultery and abortion. It may also include discrimination against women who work, go to school, or appear outside their homes without a male escort.

Society's control of female sexuality is often physically inscribed on female bodies. One example is female genital cutting performed in some African and Middle Eastern societies. There are many versions of these operations, varying from nicking the clitoris without removing any of the flesh to operations that remove all external genitalia and sew the vaginal opening partially closed (Onsongo, 2017). A second is Chinese foot binding, which may have affected 40% to 50% of Chinese women in the 19th century (Lim, 2007; Figure 12.3). Foot binding involved breaking a young girl's toes and the arch of her foot and then using a tightly wrapped cloth to shape the foot and restrict its normal growth (Rossi, 1976). The practice was banned in 1912. Gang rape in the United States (Sanday, 1992) and *sati*, the Indian practice of women being burned to death on their husbands' funeral pyres (Narasimhan, 1990), provide additional examples.

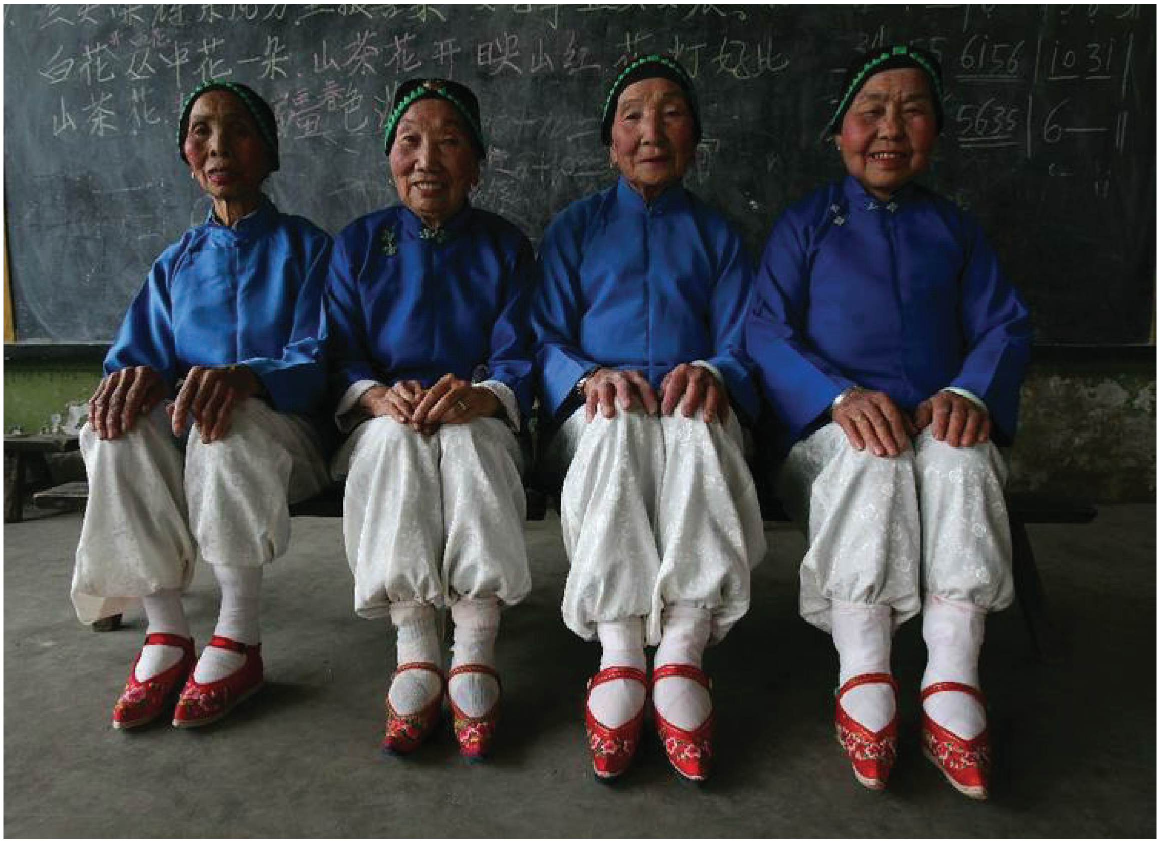


Figure 12.3 Society’s control of women is often inscribed on their bodies. In China, foot binding was once common. The practice was banned in 1912 but continued in some places, as was the case for these women in Liuyi, a village in Yunnan Province, where, in 2007, there were over 100 elderly women with bound feet.

China Photos/Getty Images

Violence against women is both a political and an economic tool. Rape has long been used as a tactic of warfare. It is not only devastating for individual women but also destroys families and communities (Milillo, 2006). In recent years, it has been practiced in Bosnia, Congo, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, and other places. It may also be used to maintain male economic superiority. For example, in 2012, Joti Singh was a young woman working nights at a tech company’s call center in Delhi, India. She was accompanied by a male friend when, on a bus ride, she was gang-raped and brutally beaten by six men. She survived long enough to report details of the incident but ultimately died of her injuries. The rape and murder resulted in international publicity and highlighted violence against working women. The perpetrators were convicted. However, between 2012 and 2014, there were more than 31,000 cases of crimes against women in Delhi, but only 150 convictions (Chamberlain & Bhabani, 2017). In 2020, Delhi reported more than 10,000 crimes against women including almost one thousand rapes (Hindustan Times, 2021).

Closer to home, the #MeToo movement of the fall of 2017 revealed the commonality of sexual violence in American business and political culture. The movement began with accusations against Harvey Weinstein, one of the most powerful movie producers in Hollywood. By the end of October, over 80 women had accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct.[1] As accusations mounted, others began to be accused as well. By early October 2018, at least 425 men—from U.S. Senator Al Franken to Stephen Wynn, the finance chairman of the Republican National Committee, and Larry Nassar, the doctor for the USA Gymnastics national team—had been fired or forced to resign their positions. Nassar was sent to prison. The scandal included politicians, entertainers, and executives of major corporations (Griffin et al., 2018). By 2022, the public figures toppled by sexual misconduct included Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York who was forced to resign in 2021, and Prince Andrew of Britain, who was stripped of his titles and “effectively banished” from the royal family in 2022 (Bilefsky, 2022). The #MeToo movement spread to other wealthy nations as well. In France, women used the hashtag #BalanceTonPorc, loosely translated as “out your pig” (Beardsley, 2017).

It is no accident that women are increasingly demanding an end to oppression. Women have often been silent in deeply oppressive societies. However, education and globalization are giving women increasing economic power. In the United States, in 1940, only 3.8% of women had college degrees. In 2019, more than 36.6% did … slightly higher than the percentage of men with college degrees

(Statistica, 2021). In India and other nations, the spread of international business has opened job opportunities for women where few existed before. In these and many other cases, increased economic power leads to increased political power. People with economic and political power are less likely to submit to oppression. However, their resistance can sometimes result in violence.

Modest Dress in Islam

Islam is practiced in many different societies, and gender ideologies vary among them. This is illustrated by the debates over wearing the **hijab**, or headscarf. Some Muslims and many non-Muslim Westerners see the hijab as a sign of the oppression of women. But often, Muslim women view the hijab as a liberating garment that forces the world to see them as more than sexual objects and establishes their identity as Muslims (Bowen, 2007). In international sporting events, women wear sports hijabs, some made by famous international brands such as Nike® (Figure 12.4).

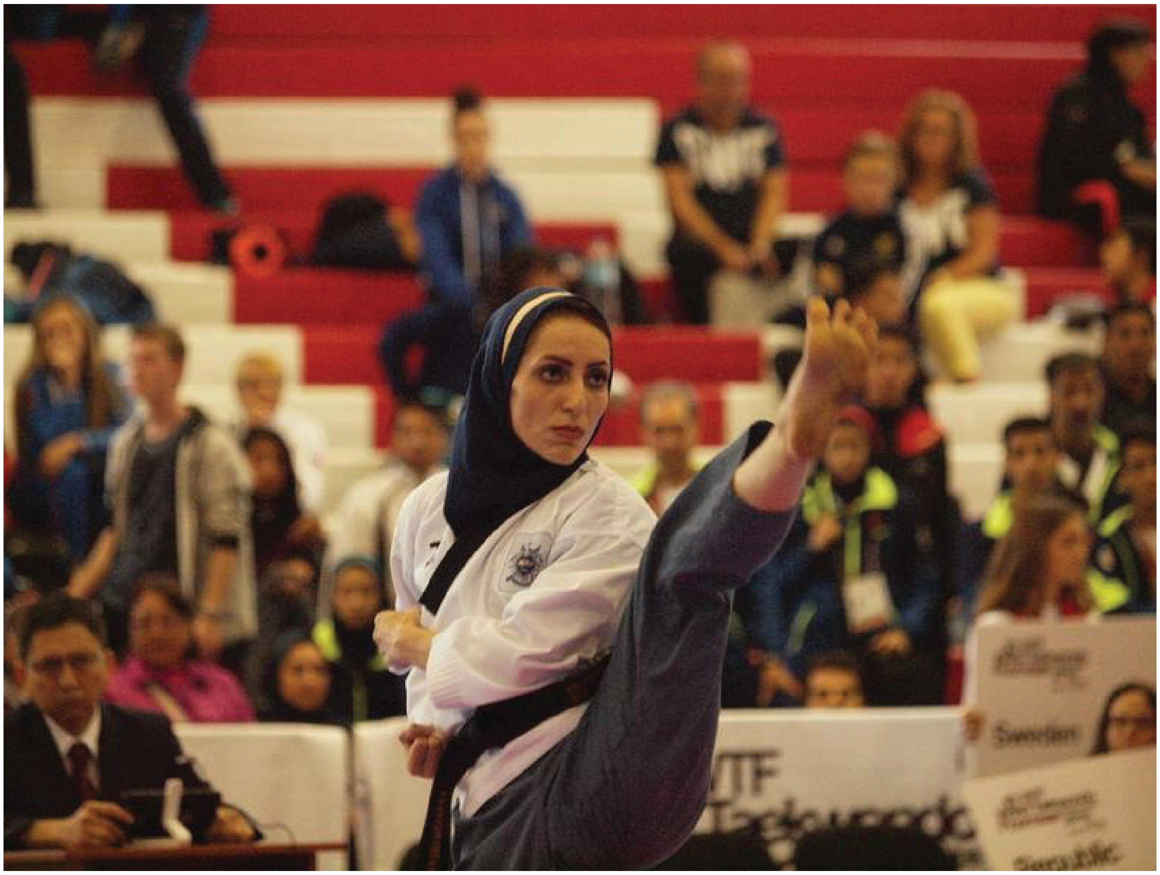


Figure 12.4 An Iranian athlete wearing a hijab demonstrates a kick at the World Taekwondo Championship in Lima, Peru, in 2016.

Fotoholica Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

The Koranic injunction requiring modest dress for Muslim women (Sura 24: 30–31) does not command any specific style of dress, so there are many local variations and interpretations. In some societies, most Muslim women wear hijabs that only loosely cover their hair and neck. In other places, niqābs, garments that cover the face below the eyes, are common. In yet others, like Yemen, women wear burqas, full head and body coverings as well as face veils. Several European countries, including Belgium, France, and Switzerland, have banned niqābs and burqas. Others, including predominantly Muslim Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, and Egypt, have laws that limit or forbid wearing these garments.

The variations in Islamic practice are the subject of intense debate. For example, both wearing and not wearing a hijab can be symbolic of resistance. Some see it as a rejection of the modern world and progressive values (Alibhai-Brown, 2015). Others see wearing it as a protest against Islamophobia. A 2005 poll of Muslim women asked what they disliked the most about their own societies. The answers ranged from violence to lack of unity to corruption. However, hijabs and other forms of body covering were never mentioned (Andrews, 2006). The concern of many Americans and Europeans over Islamic dress may tell us much more about their ethnocentrism and fear of outsiders than it does about the oppression of women.

Western understandings of the hijab and other forms of modest dress also exact a heavy toll on Muslim men, particularly in Europe and North America. Anthropologist Katherine Ewing (2008b) examined the position of Turkish men in German society. She found that they were often demonized. A critical reason for this was the widespread belief that they oppressed their wives and daughters. Ewing argues that these assumptions about Turkish masculinity play an important role in the construction of German national identity. They are reinforced by the popular media, films, social work policies, and public policy. Ewing notes that European ideas about Middle Eastern gender relations are based on longstanding fantasies that imagined the Middle East as exotic, autocratic, and oppressive.

Proving Manhood

Gender ideologies that require men to prove themselves to be virile, daring, heroic, successful in competition, and able to impress or control women are widespread. David Gilmore (1990) argues that the idea of manhood as something that must be sought after and rigorously tested is ubiquitous (Figure 12.5). The call for boys to “act like men” is found in cultures throughout the world. Gilmore refers to the commonality of these ideas as “the manhood puzzle.”

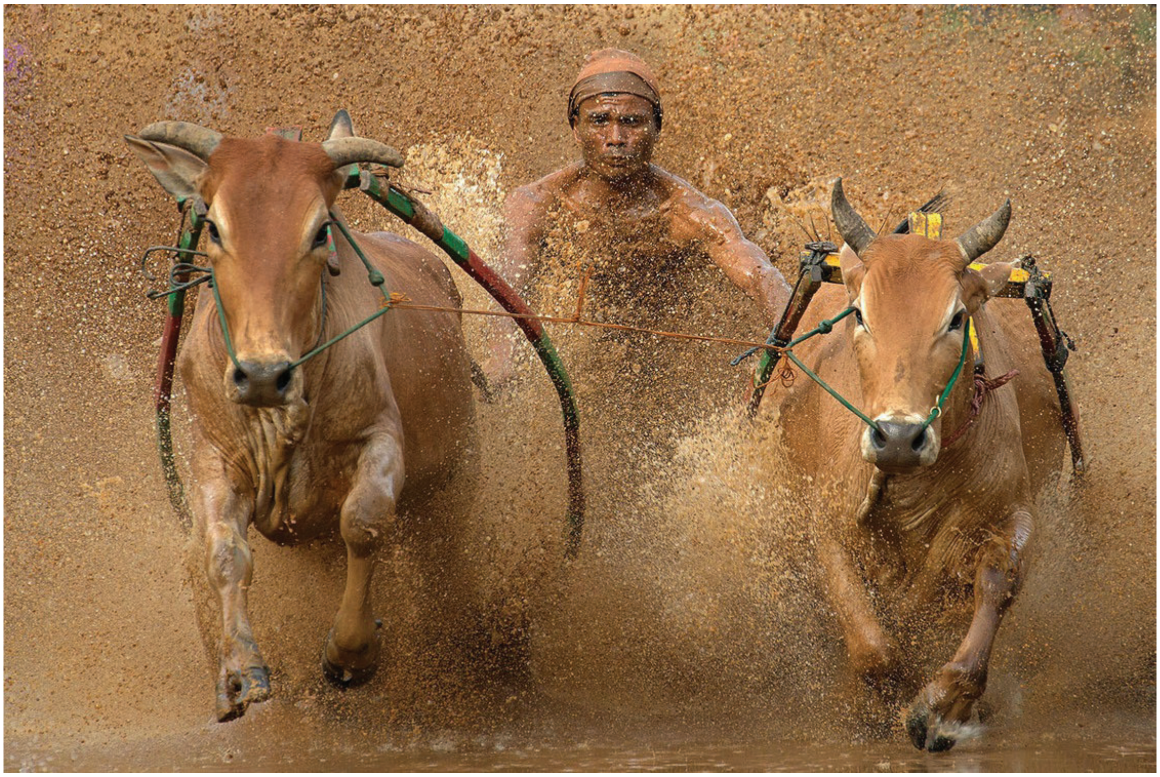


Figure 12.5 Displaying maleness through competition, assertiveness, or risk-taking behavior is common in many societies. In this image, a jockey holds the tails of cattle racing through muddy rice paddies in the annual Pacu Jawi race in Pariangan, Indonesia.

Sharkawi Che Din / Alamy Stock Photo

The specific types of behavior that constitute maleness vary from place to place. Even within a culture, there are almost always numerous roles men play. In a small foraging society, the way that one displays maleness as a shaman is different from the way one displays maleness as a hunter or fighter. In large and complex societies, the range of different male roles and male behaviors is enormous. However, demands for men to display traits such as bravery, strength, fortitude, creativity, and intellect are extremely common across cultures. This is probably linked to a male desire for prestige that seems universal. There are many ways of showing maleness and many ways of gaining prestige, but there is no culture in which prestige is not an issue.

Richard Lee, an anthropologist who worked among the Ju/'hoansi, a foraging group in South Africa, tells the now-classic story of his attempt to make a feast for his friends. Lee bought an ox for the feast. He informed his friends of his purchase, but rather than praising him, they insulted him, telling him that he was ripped off and the ox he had purchased was a poor animal. However, when they had the feast, food was plentiful. As hunters, the Ju/'hoansi have keen eyes for appraising animals. They must have known that the ox would be sufficient. Why did they tell him it was not? When Lee asked this question, his friends told him that whenever a hunter bragged about the size of his kill or the way he was providing for others, they always insulted him. Such bragging was a sign of arrogance. Lee’s friend Tomazo said, “When a young man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief or big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can’t accept this … so we always speak of his meat as worthless” (R. Lee, 1969).

Lee’s story shows two very important things. First, even in an extremely egalitarian society such as the Ju/’hoansi, issues of male prestige are important. The practice of insulting or ignoring someone who boasts can only exist if people searching for prestige through boasting also exist. That argues for the universality of such searching. However, it also reminds us of the critical importance of culture. The male search for prestige may be biologically based (though no one has yet found a gene for it). But even if this is the case, it is expressed only through culture. Culture, as among the Ju/’hoansi, can serve to suppress and damp down the desire for prestige. Alternatively, hierarchical societies such as chiefdoms (or our own society for that matter) emphasize it.

Gender and Bullfighting in Spain

Games and sports such as football in the United States, cockfighting in Bali, rugby in Tonga, or bullfighting in Spain are all ways of both learning and reinforcing culturally constructed gender ideologies.

Clifford Geertz called these activities “deep play” (Geertz, 1973a), because they heighten emotions, display compelling aspects of social structure and culture, and reinforce culturally constructed identities. The construction of masculinity in the Spanish bullfight is a good example.

Honor is a central concept in Spanish masculine identity (Gilmore, 1996). The art of bullfighting is one of the ways this cultural value is expressed. Although many outsiders and a growing number of Spaniards consider bullfighting cruel, people who enjoy bullfighting view it as a sport and an aesthetic ritual (Eller, 2006, p. 104). For them, bullfights involve a complex process that makes violence not only acceptable but also beautiful. The point of a bullfight is not simply to kill a bull. That would be easy and would lack any cultural meaning. Rather, the skill, grace, and courage of the bullfighter are central to the performance. The bullfight embodies the values of male competition in defense of honor.

The key to the bullfight is understanding that it symbolizes a public physical showdown between two men. The matador symbolizes the honorable male. He appears in formal dress that does not overtly suggest violence. Although matadors are certainly athletic, they are not obviously big, strong, or aggressive. The bull symbolizes the dishonorable male. The bull is angry, out of control, but clearly powerful. In the fight, the matador maintains calm self-control. He uses violence without becoming violent (Figure 12.6).

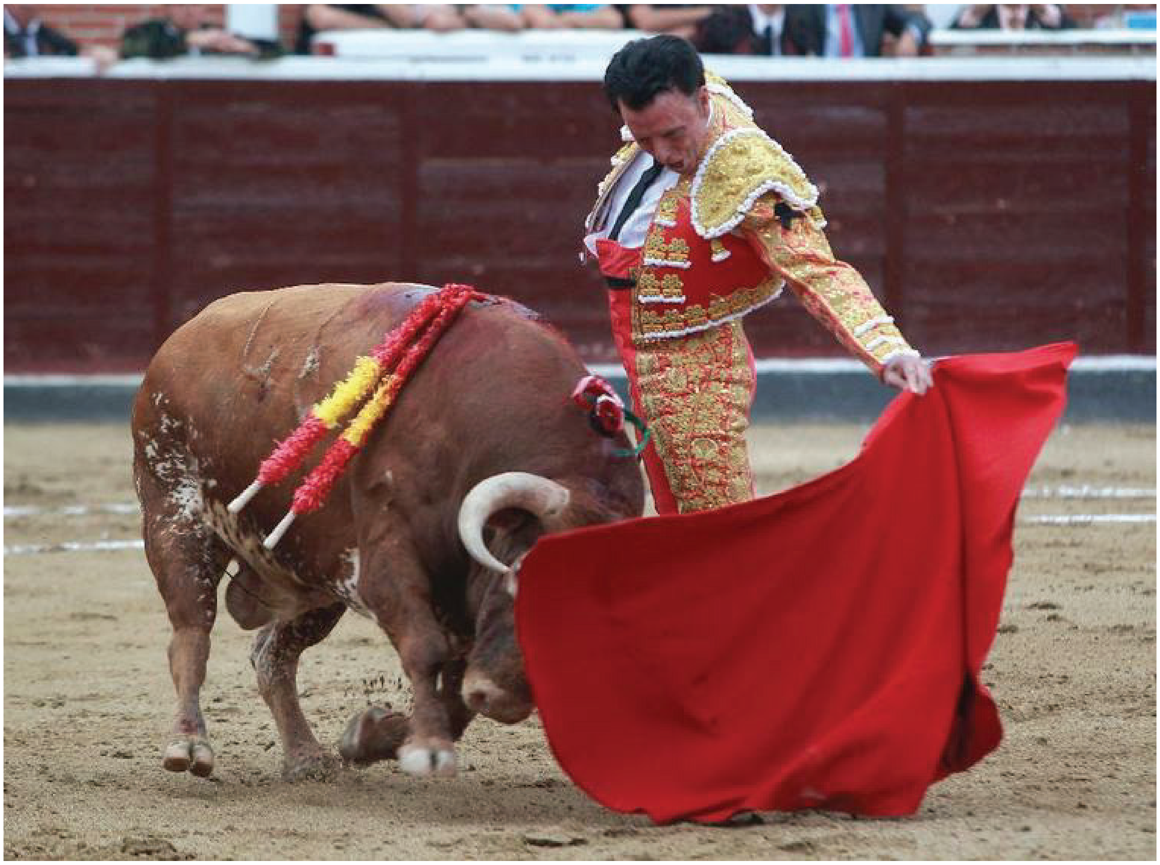


Figure 12.6 Formally dressed matador José Ortega Cano shows a calm display of skill as a bull passes within inches of him at a bullfight near Madrid in 2017.

ALBERTO SIMON/AFP via Getty Images

The kill is the most dangerous part of the performance. Ideally, the matador dispatches the bull with a single sword thrust that immediately kills the animal. A matador who fails to enact a speedy death is judged poorly by spectators and may be called a murderer.

Boxing is unpopular in Spain, where it is frequently interpreted as men indulging their animal nature. It is popularly considered an underground activity for delinquents (Gibson, 2015). But a bullfight is a performance that allows men to transcend their animal nature, as it distinguishes a man of honor from a man of anger.

The construction of gender identity is complex, and people have probably always challenged gender roles. Throughout history, almost all matadors have been men. However, there is evidence of a few female matadors going back to the mid-18th century. A female matador, known as “La Pajuelera,” is depicted in an etching by the famous artist Francisco Goya from the early 1800s. In the 20th century, there were more female matadors, including the American Bette Ford, an actress who became the first woman to perform on foot at the world’s largest bullfight arena in Mexico City. Cristina Sanchez was one of the most successful female bullfighters of the late 20th century. However, she retired after three seasons. On the one hand, Sanchez’s bullfighting success brought debates about modern Spanish gender roles into the open. On the other hand, she was the victim of attacks and slurs by male matadors (Pink, 2003).

VARIABILITY IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Research shows that there is a great deal of variation in the ways different cultures construct sex and gender. Cultures differ on the extent to which this variation is recognized; whether it is ritualized; the special functions of alternative sexes and genders, such as healing or acting as go-betweens in marriages; and the value or stigma placed on such variations (Nanda, 2000).

Variation in Gender Roles

Ethnography

The Hijras: An Alternative Gender Role in India

The hijra of India is a gender role that is neither masculine nor feminine. Hijras are born as men, but they dress and live as women. The hijras undergo operations in which their genitals are surgically removed, but unlike postoperative transgender individuals in the West who understand themselves as women, this operation turns men into hijra, who are neither male nor female (Figure 12.7).

Figure 12.7 Hijras are members of a third gender group. Born male or intersex, they dress as women and refer to themselves using female forms of address.

Arindam Shivaani/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Hijras are followers of a Hindu goddess, Bahuchara Mata, and the hijra subculture is partly a religious group centered on the worship of this goddess. By dressing as women, and especially through emasculation as a ritual expression of their religious devotion, the hijras attempt to completely identify with the goddess. Through this operation, the hijras believe that the procreative powers of the goddess are transferred to them. The first official government count of hijra, held in 2014, identified 490,000 hirjas in India (Nagarajan, 2014). There are also hijras in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Traditionally, the hijras earn their living by performing at life-cycle ceremonies, such as the birth of a child (formerly only for male children, who are much desired in India, but sometimes for female children today), and at weddings. Because the hijras are vehicles of the goddess’s powers of procreation, many people understand their presence as necessary on these occasions. They ask the goddess to bless the newborn or the married couple with prosperity and fertility. Hijras also serve the goddess in her temples.

Although the word *hijra* is sometimes translated as hermaphrodite, few hijras are born hermaphrodite; almost all are born biologically male. Because impotence was a marker of failed masculinity in Victorian Britain, colonial authorities often classed hijra as impotent men. However, in India, hijras were understood as either unable or disinclined to have sex with women (Hinchy, 2013). In some parts of India, people believe that if such men do not become hijra, they will be reborn impotent for seven future lives.

The concept of the hijra as neither man nor woman emphasizes that hijras are not men because they cannot function sexually as men, even though they were assigned to the male sex at birth. Hijras also claim that they do not have sexual feelings for women, and a real hijra is not supposed to have ever had sexual relations with a woman. But if hijras, as a third gender, are man minus man, they are also man plus woman.

The most obvious aspect of hijras as women is in their dress. Wearing female attire is a defining characteristic of hijras. They are required to dress as women when they perform their traditional roles of singing and dancing at births, weddings, and whenever they are in the temple of their goddess. Hijras enjoy dressing as women, and their feminine dress is accompanied by traditionally feminine jewelry and body decoration. Hijras must also wear their hair long like women.

Hijras adopt female behavior. They imitate a woman’s walk, they sit and stand like women, and they carry pots on their hips as women do. Hijras adopt female names when they join the community, and they use female kinship terms for each other, such as aunt or sister. They also have a special linguistic dialect, which includes feminine expressions and intonations. In public buildings, such as the movies, or on buses and trains, hijras often request “ladies-only” seating.

Although hijras are like women in many ways, they are clearly not women. Their female dress and mannerisms are often exaggerated almost to the point of caricature, especially when they act in a sexually suggestive manner. Their sexual aggressiveness is considered outrageous and very much the opposite of the expected demure behavior of ordinary Indian women in their roles of wives, mothers, and daughters. Hijra performances are essentially burlesques of women; the entertainment value comes from the difference between themselves, acting as women, and the real women they imitate. Hijras often use obscene and abusive language, which again is contrary to acceptable Indian feminine behavior. In some parts of India, hijras smoke hookahs and cigarettes, which only men normally do.

The major reason hijras are not considered women, however, is that they cannot give birth. Many hijras wish to have biological children of their own, and there are many stories within the community that express this desire. But all hijras acknowledge that this can never be.

As neither man nor woman, the hijras identify themselves with many third-gender figures in Hindu mythology and Indian culture: male deities who change into or disguise themselves as females temporarily, deities who have both male and female characteristics, male religious devotees who dress and act as women in religious ceremonies, and the eunuchs who served in the Muslim courts. Indian culture thus not only accommodates such androgynous figures but views them as meaningful and even powerful.

The emphasis in this ethnography has been on the cultural conception of the hijra role. The realities of hijra life do not always match the ideal, and as in all other societies, there are tensions between the ways in which hijras understand themselves and the realities of their lives. A significant source of conflict among hijras is their widespread practice of prostitution. Hijras serve as sexual partners for men, which contradicts their identity as ascetics. Hijras see prostitution as deviant within their community, and many deny that it occurs.

Others justify it by pointing to their declining incomes from traditional performances.

In many societies, alternative gender roles declined because they were suppressed by colonial authorities and Christian missionaries. Hijras, however, continue to function as an integral part of Indian culture, both in traditional roles and in changing roles that reflect new adaptations. In recent years, India’s half-million hijras and other third-gender individuals have seen some increased political success. In 1998, Shabnam Bano became the first transgender Indian to be elected to an Indian state assembly. In 2014, India’s Supreme Court recognized a third gender and required legal protection and equality for its members. And in 2015, a hijra, Madhu Kinnar, was elected mayor of Raigarh, a town of 137,000 (Patkar, 2015).

Significantly, hijra success in politics has been achieved by emphasizing rather than denying their ambiguous gender. When they enter politics, hijras explicitly construct themselves as individuals without the obligations of family, gender, or caste and emphasize that they are therefore free from the corrupting influence of nepotism, which plagues Indian politics. They also emphasize their identity as ascetics, Hindu religious figures who renounce sexual relations, and claim historical continuities with many Hindu political reformers. Many Indians believe that hijras are more empathetic to issues of poverty and social stigma because of their low social status, and this has enabled hijras to defeat traditionally powerful upper-caste opponents.

However, there has also been some backlash against these moves, and Indian legislators have sometimes tried to make life more difficult for hijras (Goel, 2019). Hijra participation in Indian politics is sometimes contested. For example, the election of one hijra was overturned on the grounds that because they are not women, hijras cannot stand for election to seats reserved for women. In this case, we see the clash between a political system based largely on Western models that recognize only two genders and Indian understandings that recognize in-between or alternative genders.

Hijras have also been hit very hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their livelihoods were decimated by periods of lockdown, and they faced high levels of housing discrimination. A disinformation campaign in the city of Hyderabad blamed hijras for spreading COVID-19. Because hijras mostly work outside of the formal economy, relief payments rarely reached them. In some places, local governments took steps specifically aimed at aiding the hijra community, including establishing separate hospital wards for them, but the efforts were meager compared to the need (Baumgart & Farooqi, 2020).

The continued recognition of hijras in Indian society is a strong testimony to the cultural construction of gender. Unlike many other traditional alternative genders among indigenous peoples that have been stamped out or repressed by the powerful states in which they now live, the hijras continue both in their traditional roles and in new roles, contributing to the cultural variation that characterizes the human species.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How does a study of the hijras contribute to an understanding of gender as culturally constructed?
2. Discuss some of the similarities and differences between the hijras and similar gender roles in other societies.
3. In what ways do elements of Indian culture relate to the maintenance of the hijra role?

Sex and gender alternatives occur under many conditions and in many cultures around the world. The fact that they are so common shows that there is no single type of society in which they are found and suggests that there is no single reason for them. In many cases, alternate gender roles fit well with ideologies that recognize individuals as having unique characteristics or emphasize beliefs about the ability of animals, humans, and spirits to transform, each into the other, or include ideas about the power of mixing male and female.

Often, fluid gender roles and particular systems of kinship are closely linked; for example, permitting men and women to take on each other's gender characteristics may be one way of making sure there are people to fill every important kin position. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Ifi Amadiume (1987) notes that members of either sex can fill male roles. Daughters can fill sons' roles, and women can be husbands, without being considered masculine or losing their femininity. Before the influence of Christianity, Igbo women and men could use wealth to take titles and acquire wives. In fact, the presence of female husbands has been reported for more than 40 African groups (Greene, 1998). In some African societies that practice woman–woman marriages, such as the Nandi of Kenya, the female husband is considered a man and adopts many aspects of the male gender role, such as participating in male initiation and public political discussions (Oboler, 1980). Woman–woman marriage provided descendants to wealthy women who were childless. It ensured marriages for women who might not otherwise have been able to marry. And it may have offered greater social and sexual freedom to them as well (Levine, 2008).

Alternative gender roles—neither man nor woman—have been described for many societies. The *xanith* of Oman, the *mahu* of Tahiti, the *muxe* of Mexico, and the *hijra* of India and Pakistan are examples of in-between genders in which men take on some of the attributes of women.

The Native American two-spirit, an alternative gender in some Native American societies, has long been a subject of anthropological interest. **Two-spirit** is a modern term used to designate individuals in many Native American groups who were considered neither men nor women and occupied a distinct gender status. They took different forms in different cultures, but the two-spirit was most often a man who dressed in women’s clothing, engaged in women’s work, and was often considered to have special spiritual powers (Whitehead, 1981). There were also female two-spirit people (Blackwood, 1984). Although alternatively gendered people were not equally valued in all Native American cultures, they were highly valued in some. For example, We'wha, a Zuni two-spirit who was a religious leader and a highly respected potter and weaver, visited Washington, D.C., in 1886 and met with President Grover Cleveland (Roscoe, 1988; Figure 12.8). In the early 21st century, *two-spirit* is often used as an umbrella term for Native Americans who are not cisgender. Annual two-spirit powwows celebrating the Native American LGBTQ2S community are held in Phoenix and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Figure 12.8 We'wha (1849–1896), a Zuni two-spirit. Two-spirits are members of an alternative gender in many Native American cultures. We'wha was a potter, a weaver, and a religious leader.

H.S. Photos / Alamy Stock Photo

Variable Norms of Sexual Behavior

Understanding gender systems as culturally constructed helps explain the cultural variations in sexual behavior. People tend to believe that sexual activity is doing what comes naturally. However, a cross-cultural perspective demonstrates this isn't the case. In sexuality, we do what comes culturally.[2]

The ages at which sexual response is believed to begin and end, the ways in which people make themselves attractive, the importance of sexual activity in human life, and variation in sexual activity according to gender are all patterned and regulated by culture and affect sexual response and behavior. Culture patterns the habitual responses of people to different parts of the body. Things that are considered erotic in some cultures evoke indifference or disgust in others. For example, there are many societies where people do not kiss. The Samoans learned to kiss from the Europeans, but before this cultural contact, they began sexual intimacy by sniffing. The patterns of social and sexual preliminaries also differ among cultures. For example, Westerners might find it disgusting that Trobriand Islanders "inspect each other's hair for lice and eat them … [which is] to the natives a natural and pleasant occupation between two who are fond of each other" (Malinowski, 1929b, p. 327). However, Malinowski also reports that the Trobrianders believe "the idea of European boys and girls going out for a picnic with a knapsack full of eatables is … disgusting and indecent" (1929b, p. 327).

In some societies, same-sex sexual activity is considered shameful and abnormal, but in other societies, it is a matter of indifference or approval, or it may even be required. The Sambia of Papua New Guinea believe that boys are made men through the receipt of semen during initiation. These rites include boys receiving semen through oral and anal sex with older males, a process anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (2014) has referred to as “boy insemination.” This process is understood as masculinizing boys. As boys grow through puberty, they progress from being inseminated to inseminating other boys. The process of marriage begins for boys when they are around 16. Then, they are expected to reduce their sexual activity with other boys. After the birth of their first child, the vast majority of Sambian men no longer engage in sexual acts with other men (Herdt, 2004).

Students might ask if these practices mean that Sambian men are gay. This question reveals something profound about our own understanding of sexuality. Western cultures have, in the past 150 years, institutionalized the idea that engaging in certain types of behavior makes one a certain type of person. The historian and sociologist Michel Foucault argued that throughout most of Western history, although certain types of sexual acts were encouraged or forbidden, sex acts did not define a certain type of person. It was only with the expansion of state and institutional power in the second half of the 19th century that sexual acts and desires became ways to classify types of people. Foucault (1990, p. 43) dates the birth of the homosexual to the appearance, in 1870, of the first article describing homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder. In the following years, a new understanding that classified people by their desires and the types of sexual activity in which they engaged became prevalent in Western Europe and the United States. Thus, our notion that engaging in specific types of sexual behavior makes one a specific type of person is as culturally particular as the Sambian idea that the process of growing men requires that boys both receive semen from and later give semen to other males.

Two classic ethnographies that highlight the role of culture in impacting sexuality are John Messenger’s work on the Irish of Inis Beag in the Aran Islands in Galway Bay, Ireland, and Donald

Marshall’s work on the people of Mangaia.

Messenger (1971, p. 15) describes Inis Beag as one of the most sexually naive of the world’s societies (Figure 12.9). Sex is rarely discussed, and practically no sexual instruction is provided to children. Adults believe that after marriage, “nature takes its course.” To refuse to have intercourse is considered a mortal sin among these Roman Catholic people. However, women are expected to endure, not enjoy, sexual relations. Nudity is abhorred, and there is no tradition of dirty jokes. The separation of the sexes begins very early in Inis Beag and lasts into adulthood. There is almost no premarital sex and a high percentage of celibate males. The main style of dancing allows little bodily contact. Even so, some girls refuse to dance at all because it means touching a boy. In explaining the extraordinarily late age of marriage, one female informant told the anthropologist, “Men can wait a long time before wanting ‘it’ but we [women] can wait a lot longer” (Messenger, 1971, p. 16).

Figure 12.9 Inis Beag, in the Aran Islands near Galway, Ireland, is known as one of the world’s most sexually

repressive places. The picture shows an Aran Islands' couple at home.

Independent News and Media/Getty Images

Compare this to Mangaia in the Cook Islands in the South Pacific, described by Donald Marshall (1971). Fantasies of sexual freedom in the South Pacific have long been a part of Western culture. No society has complete sexual freedom, but especially compared to places like Inis Beag, the islands of Polynesia do have high levels of it. In Mangaia, sexual intercourse is one of life's major interests. Sex is not discussed at home, but Mangaia elders teach sexual information to boys and girls at puberty. Boys receive instruction about sex and have their first sexual experiences as adolescents and are considered men afterward. This contrasts with Inis Beag, where a man is considered a "lad" until he is about 40. In Mangaia, public discussion of sex, sex jokes, and references to sexual activity are the norm and are often expected as part of the preliminaries to public meetings. Although in public, boys and girls are segregated, practically everyone has intercourse before marriage. The act of sexual intercourse itself is the focus of sexual activity. Both men and women are expected to take pleasure in the sexual act and to reach orgasm. Celibacy is practically unknown.

THEORIES OF GENDER AND STRATIFICATION

Most theories of gender from the 1970s to the 1990s focused on the gender hierarchy and the status of women. Studies examined the significance of women's roles as mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters; women's economic contributions; women's perceptions of their cultures; and many other subjects.

The question of whether male dominance is universal emerged as an early debate in the anthropology of gender. One theoretical position held that women’s subordination to men is universal, based on women’s roles as mothers and homemakers (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). In this view, all societies are divided into a less prestigious domestic (private) world, inhabited by women, and a more prestigious public world, dominated by men. This **private/public dichotomy** was clearly a feature of the working class and middle class of industrialized societies in the 19th and 20th centuries. As men went to work in factories, women were often expected to stay at home, concern themselves with domestic affairs, and accept a subordinate and dependent role (Martin, 1987). However, anthropologists debate how common the public/private dichotomy really is. It may be far more typical of 19th- and 20th-century capitalist societies than of others. Even within those societies, women in poorer households and women of color were much more likely to work outside the home than their wealthier white counterparts. Further, home, family, economics, and politics are not easily separated. Analyzing society in terms of a private/public dichotomy can hide the connections among power, work, and family structures critical to understanding gender relations.

Ernestine Friedl was an early critic of the notion that the private/public dichotomy was the key to women’s status. She attributed widespread male dominance to economic factors. In her comparative examination of foraging and horticultural societies, she noted that one key factor in women’s status was the degree to which they controlled the distribution and exchange of goods and services outside the domestic unit (Friedl, 1975). She argued that the more economic control men exercised, the greater their status and their power over women. However, in societies where women were able to control economic resources, their status increased. Friedl also suggested that because the care of small children can be shared by older children, neighbors, relatives, and others, women’s low status cannot be explained by their obligations in childrearing. Thus, women’s roles could not be explained as an adaptation to pregnancy and childcare.

Other theories of gender inequality include Marxist-oriented and ecological approaches. The first emphasizes the cultural and historical variation in women’s status, particularly the effects of the expansion of capitalism and colonialism (Leacock, 1981). The second focuses on issues such as ecological stress and warfare. Sanday (1981), for example, found that where group survival rests more on male actions, such as warfare, women are more likely to accept male dominance.

Although these theories remain valuable, they all tended to consider women and men as two unified classes. They focused on looking at status distributions and tensions between men and women. More recent work breaks away from this mold. In 1989, in a landmark essay, the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Figure 12.10) pointed out that women are not a unified group of people with single interests. Both men and women are members of multiple overlapping groups. In addition to their gender identity, they may be members of different races, have different educational levels, be wealthy or poor, be young or old, and experience their sexuality differently. Crenshaw termed this **intersectionality**. Thinking about intersectionality forces us to focus on the fact that gender, class, sexual orientation, and other aspects of people’s experience of society do not exist independently. Rather, they are woven together in complex patterns.

Figure 12.10 Kimberlé Crenshaw

Mike Coppola/Getty Images for Busboys and Poets

The sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) used Crenshaw's concept to focus on the experience of Black women in the United States. She traced the history of Black feminism and pointed to the vast differences between the historical experiences of white and Black women in the United States. She coined the term "outsider-within" to describe the position of Black women who worked for and had a deep knowledge of white families. Such individuals gained profound understandings of the power hierarchy but remained outsiders to it. Similar positionality affects others such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

Many anthropologists, including Lynn Bolles (2016), Tom Boellstorff (2016), and Louise Lamphere (2016), have built on the insights of intersectionality. Thinking about cultures in terms of intersectionality increases our analytical insight. It leads us to expect that people will not necessarily experience solidarity based on their gender identity alone. Current wealthy societies are composed of innumerable overlapping social groups. At any moment, an individual's gender identity can be overridden by any other identity—as a white person, a person of color, a wealthy person, an educated person…. However, even in small-scale structurally simple societies, it's never as simple as all men and all women. Young people have different interests than old people. People with one sort of talent have different interests than those with other sorts of talents. Society is never as simple as men dominating women.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Working With Female Heroin Addicts

Anthropologist and medical doctor Kimberly Sue has worked with heroin-addicted women in the Boston area since the early 2000s. Her 2019 book *Getting Wrecked: Women, Incarceration, and the American Opioid Crisis* details the profoundly troubled lives of many of these women. It shows how jails, prisons, health care providers, and the state, sometimes despite sincere intentions, fail to help these women stabilize their lives. The women are profoundly impacted by structural vulnerabilities, including family instability, poverty, race, and gender differences. They are part of an American underclass that is often ignored and frequently institutionalized.

Impoverished addicts face many problems, but perhaps the most compelling is the endless cycling of individuals through the carceral institutions of the state. Women are arrested for a wide variety of causes, but almost all are nonviolent crimes such as prostitution or shoplifting. Under incarceration, they go through the horrors of withdrawal from the opiates they have become addicted to. There are drugs that not only ease the pain of opiate withdrawal but also greatly reduce or eliminate cravings for heroin and other opiates. However, these are not provided by jails and prisons. Instead, various forms of therapy are offered. In many cases, women are taught to understand their experiences as a form of trauma. However, Sue points out that this is a kind of contradiction since prisons are also sources of trauma, including rape and abuse (2019, p. 105).

When women are released from incarceration, they face extraordinary obstacles. Their prison records and lack of education make them ineligible for all but the most menial jobs. Many lack stable family situations or locations to which they can return. Beds in halfway houses and treatment centers are inadequate, and living conditions in these places are often unpleasant. As a result, women frequently go to live with their former pimps and drug suppliers. This, unsurprisingly, leads them back to both drug use and the prostitution and crime necessary to support drug habits. Additionally, newly released women face another problem: Since they have gone through opiate withdrawal and come out of prison “clean,” they are at extremely high risk for overdose. Many of the women Sue worked with had overdosed repeatedly. Again, effective medications to reverse overdose are available but are not supplied to the addicted community in sufficient quantity.

Changing the conditions of violence, poverty, and discrimination that characterize the lives of impoverished addicts is an extraordinarily difficult task. However, Dr. Sue, now the medical director of the National Harm Reduction Coalition, which advocates for policy and public health reform that improves the lives of drug users, shows us that many things can be done. Users can be provided with drug-based therapies that evidence shows are virtually essential in the recovery from heroin addiction. Many people could be supplied with easy-to-administer drugs that reverse opioid overdoses. Giving people access to clean needles, safe places to use drugs, and heroin-assisted treatment programs, as is done in other countries (including Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany), would reduce crime, improve health, and help keep users out of prison. Sue’s work pushes us to examine how incarceration destroys the lives of people who use drugs and makes it almost impossible for them to recover. It shows us that we need to think about drugs and incarceration in new ways and that anthropological thinking can help us make a difference.

GENDER RELATIONS AND SYSTEMS OF PRODUCTION

Because each cultural situation is complex and unique, it is difficult to make broad statements about the many ways gender is related to systems of production and the distribution of prestige and power. Local conditions must always be considered, and variability is the rule rather than the exception. Despite this, it remains useful to offer some generalizations about how production systems tend to affect and correlate with the systemic distribution of power among men and women.

Gender Relations in Foraging Societies

In many foraging societies, such as the Tiwi of Australia and the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari Desert in Namibia, women make very significant contributions to the food supply by gathering vegetable foods (Lee, 2003). In other societies, like the Agta of the Philippines, both women and men hunt (Estioko-Griffin, 1986). Such contributions are an important source of female power and tend to favor gender equality. Women frequently participate in making alliances outside of the household, and this is also important in women’s power. However, even in these societies, men have avenues to prestige not available to women. Often, only men hunt large animals and gain the prestige associated with distributions of meat. Men often dominate ritual activities as well.

The Tlingit of the Northwest Coast of North America are members of a foraging society in which women and men have great equality. Important Tlingit social roles are based on individual ability, training, and personality rather than on gender (Klein, 1995). Both Tlingit women and men achieve prestige through their own efforts. Women may be heads of clans or tribes, and Tlingit aristocrats are both male and female. Trade can provide prestige, and both men and women participate in it. Both girls and boys are expected to “work, save, get wealth and goods” (Klein, 1995, p. 35). Tlingit women are often able to take advantage of educational opportunities and are encouraged by their families to participate in public life. In early 2022, more than half of the 113 delegates to the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska were women, as were all three tribal judges (Central Council, n.d.) (Figure 12.11).

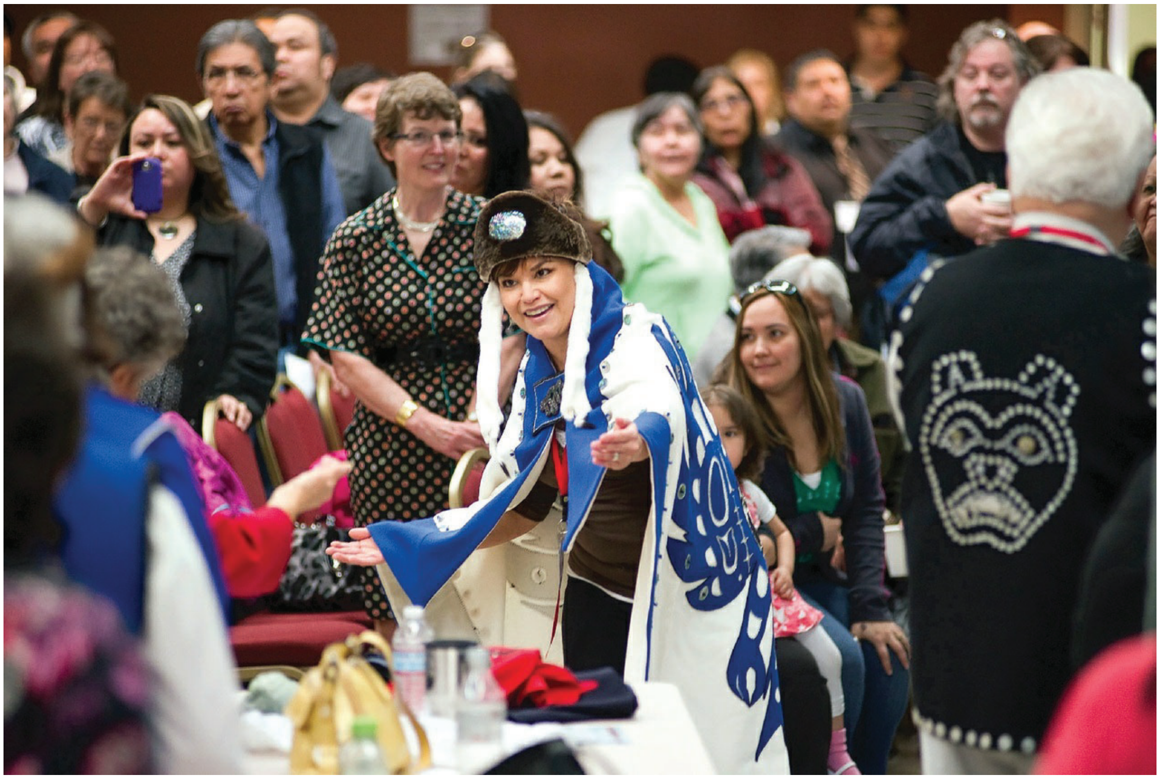


Figure 12.11 In early 2022, more than half of the 113 delegates to the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska were women. Here, Brenda Leask, a delegate from Klawock, Alaska, participates in the Grand Entrance of Convention Officers in 2012.

AP Photo/Michael Penn, Juneau Empire

Gender Relations in Horticultural Societies

Women usually have less autonomy and power in horticultural societies than in foraging ones, but, again, there is great variation. For example, the Iroquois of the eastern United States are highly egalitarian (Brown, 1975), whereas the Yanomami of Venezuela and Brazil are highly sex segregated and male dominated (Chagnon, 1997).

Men's power in gardening societies may be linked to the relatively high levels of violence common in these societies (Blick, 1988; Keeley, 1996). Most violence is led by men. When there is fighting between villages, kin groups, or members of different ethnic groups, successful men gain social prestige, and the status gap between men and women widens.

The presence of warfare may also be linked to rituals that focus on men and create solidarity among them. Among the Mundurucú of the Brazilian Amazon, for example, adolescent boys are initiated into the men’s cult and thereafter spend most of their lives in the men’s house, only visiting their wives and children who live in the village. The men’s cults exclude women and are surrounded by secrecy. They often include the use of sacred musical instruments such as flutes, which are symbolic expressions of male dominance (Murphy & Murphy, 1974; Figure 12.12). Of course, women may be skeptical of men’s ritual power. One woman’s comment on hearing the men play their sacred flutes was “there they go again” (Gregor & Tuzin, 2001).

Figure 12.12 Horticultural societies often have a high degree of sexual segregation. Men may control important ritual objects, often including flutes. Here, a flute player performs at a festival in Papua New Guinea.

ERIC LAFFORGUE / Alamy Stock Photo

Gender Relations in Pastoral Societies

Pastoral societies tend to be male dominated, though some variation exists. In pastoral societies, women’s status depends on the degree to which the society combines herding with cultivation, its history, and the diffusion of cultural ideas, such as those associated with Islam. Men do almost all the herding in these societies, and women usually make a smaller contribution to the food supply (Martin & Voorhies, 1975). Males dominate partly because handling large animals requires strength. Women handle smaller animals, engage in dairy work, carry water, and process animal by-products such as milk, wool, and hides (O’Kelly & Carney, 1986). Pastoral societies generally lack rigid distinctions between public and domestic roles. Herders’ camps are typically divided into male and female spaces, but both men and women work in public, blurring the private/public dichotomy. Male economic dominance is often reinforced by patricentric kinship systems and the warfare frequently present in these societies (Sanday, 1981).

Within this broad pattern, there is considerable variation in gender relations. For example, among the Tuareg, a largely Muslim herding society of the central Sahara, women generally have high prestige and substantial influence (Rasmussen, 2005). Tuareg descent group membership follows the mother’s line, and this helps women maintain rights and privileges. They have minimal social and economic separation from men and can be singers and musicians and organize social events. They generally enjoy freedom of choice in sexual involvements, though this has been somewhat modified among those Tuareg who are more devout Muslims. The Tuareg appear to be an exception to the patriarchy usually found in pastoral societies, but they are also an essential reminder that gender roles vary greatly, even within similar economic types of societies and within religious traditions.

Gender Relations in Agricultural Societies

Agricultural societies are a good example of the principle that women lose status in society as the importance of their economic contribution declines. In most cases, women are less directly involved in food production in agricultural societies than in the other systems, and their social status is correspondingly lower. However, there is much variation. For example, women tend to play larger roles in wet rice agriculture than in plow agriculture.

As women's economic contribution declines, they lose status, and this is also generally accompanied by their increasing isolation in domestic work in the home and the increasing numbers of children they bear (Ember, 1983). Machine technology reduces the overall labor force, and this also particularly affects women, who are disproportionately excluded from mechanized agriculture. Women are also paid lower wages as agricultural laborers and are concentrated in such labor-intensive agricultural tasks as weeding, transplanting, and harvesting. Also, as men more easily enter a cash economy, selling crops and animals, the transition to this economic system in most cases lowers women's status and makes them more dependent on men.

CHANGING GENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

Over the past 500 years, the processes of invasion, colonization, trade, and ultimately globalization have transformed production systems worldwide, leading to a tightly interwoven global economy, a process we will examine more fully in Chapter 14. This process altered the nature of gender relations in societies around the world and continues to have a deep impact.

Until the late 20th century, much of globalization involved entangling societies throughout the world in an increasingly industrialized economy centered in Europe, North America, and Japan. Vast areas of Latin America, Africa, and Asia were forcibly joined to this economy, largely as areas that produced the raw materials for industry and consumed some of the production of that industry. For this to work, economies had to be drawn into the financial systems centered in the wealthy nations. Producers were paid for their goods in money created by rich nations (such as the British West African pound used in colonial Nigeria or the *piastre de commerce* used in the 19th and 20th centuries in French colonial Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), and that money could be used to purchase manufactured goods produced by industrialized nations.

This process changed gender relations. In many cases, men had control of the raw materials, such as cotton, rubber, oilseed, and grain, that wealthy nations wanted. The result was that men's labor was increasingly paid for in cash. However, women's labor was often in the home and in craft production. Household labor was not compensated in cash, and although crafts could be sold, their value was much less than the value of industrial raw materials. Thus, women's position and power tended to decline relative to men's position.

However, the processes of globalization did not have a single uniform effect and changed with time. For example, in Mata Chico, Peru, in the 1930s, access to land was critical, and the only way for women to get land was to marry. By the 1980s, Peru was increasingly urbanized, and new occupations were available to women. Because women could support themselves and their children through employment in urban areas, they remained single longer and, in some cases, chose not to marry at all (Vincent, 1998).

In the past 25 years, industrial production by multinational corporations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa has exploded, opening job possibilities for both men and women in fields like clothing manufacturing, food processing, and electronics assembly. Young women are frequently considered ideal employees for manufacturing processes that require concentration and dexterity (Figure 12.13). Often, working conditions are harsh and jobs ill-paid. We explore all these working conditions more fully in Chapter 15. Nevertheless, these jobs give women a chance to earn money on their own and the opportunity to act in their own interests. Thus, the movement toward urban factory employment may reduce the power differentials between men and women.

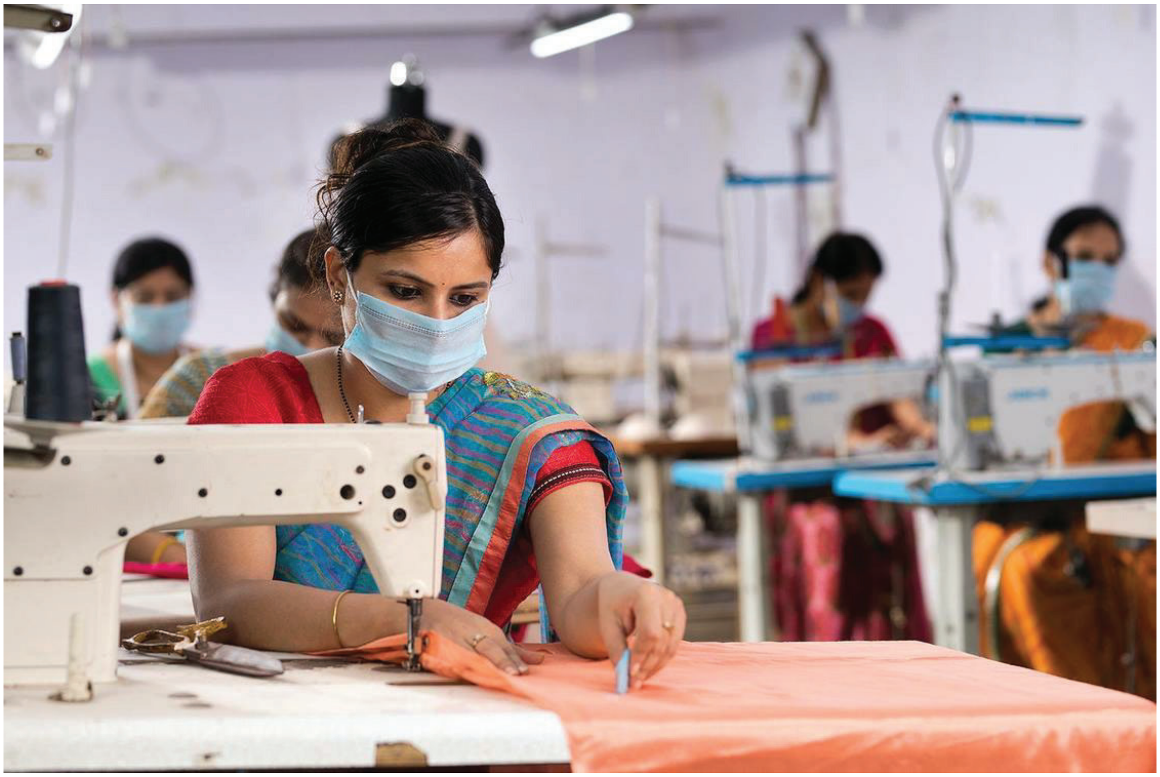


Figure 12.13 Young women are frequently considered ideal employees for manufacturing processes that require concentration and dexterity. Here, workers in India sew fabrics.

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Gender and Family in Current-Day Wealthy Societies

Most people in the world today live in societies that have very high population levels, high degrees of urbanization, a high value placed on education, and significant job uncertainty and mobility. These characteristics are correlated with dramatic changes in the family and in our understanding of ourselves and our genders. Movement in this direction has gone the furthest in the wealthy nations of North America, Europe, and Asia, but it is present throughout the world, particularly in urban settings where, even in poor nations, the majority of people increasingly live.

In most societies for most of human history, the family was central to people’s identity. No matter how society was organized, families played critical roles. Few societies had institutions beyond the family for educating children or caring for the sick or the aged. Except for foraging societies, large families tended to be the rule rather than the exception. As we saw in Chapter 11, a large family was linked to both economic wealth and political power. In these circumstances, building, managing, and organizing families was a crucial social concern. And this had important implications for understandings of gender and sexuality.

Historically, a basic concern of every family was to ensure its survival and growth. Families needed to create kinship networks that promoted their prosperity and safety. The key to both was marriage and offspring. Thus, although societies often had a variety of gender roles, the pressure for people to marry and have children was enormous. Marriage was often arranged by families. Frequently, spouses did not meet before their marriage and had little knowledge of each other. This was not terribly important because the purpose of marriage was to produce and legitimize children and to create alliances between networks of families. Whether marriage partners liked each other or whether they were sexually attracted to each other was not central to the meaning and function of marriage. Problems in marriage happened when there were no children or when alliances failed, not when partners discovered that they did not care for one another.

It is important to understand that love and sexual desire exist equally in all societies. There is no reason to believe that people in gardening or agricultural societies or in societies a hundred or ten thousand years ago felt love or desire less often than people do today. However, they did not necessarily expect to feel them in marriage. People formed intense bonds with their siblings, parents, children, and friends. They sometimes sought sexual partners outside of marriage. They may have experienced themselves as deeply driven by sexual desire or not driven much at all by such desire. They may have experienced themselves as physically attracted to members of the opposite sex or members of their own sex. The critical point is that, in most cases, as long as marriage partners remained together and filled their obligations to have children, matters of sexuality and sexual attraction were not very important. Most people neither defined themselves by their sexuality nor understood their marriages to be successful or unsuccessful as a consequence of the degree to which they were emotionally fulfilling. Certainly, in almost every society, some people married for romantic love, but this was the exception rather than the rule.

Patterns of marriage and family underwent fundamental shifts with industrialization, improvements in health care, urbanization, and the emergence of large middle-class populations in Europe and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. These shifts continued as industrialization and urbanization spread around the world in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Better health care, particularly improved sanitation, meant that more children survived. Urbanization and industrialization led to high levels of mobility, increasing investment in children, and higher costs for raising children. At the same time, state and private institutions increasingly provided education, health care, and old-age care. These factors reduced the importance of family connections and family size in ensuring prosperity and security. One result of this is a declining number of marriages and the steadily diminishing number of children born per married couple. As we saw in Chapter 11, the number of children born per adult woman is now declining throughout the world.

Since families’ economic, social, and political futures are no longer tied to achieving certain marriage alliances or having large numbers of children, family interest in controlling marriage has declined. In this context, although some people certainly marry for money or status, marriages built around the idea of romantic love have tended to replace other forms.

The rise of romantic love as the dominant social form has profound consequences on how we express gender and sexuality. When the overriding social purpose of sex and marriage is to produce children and make alliances, people may experience and express their sexuality in many different ways, but there are unlikely to be many different genders. Most people marry and have children regardless of their sexuality. But when the purpose of sex and marriage is to achieve personal fulfillment through romantic love, a multiplicity of genders can flourish (Figure 12.14).

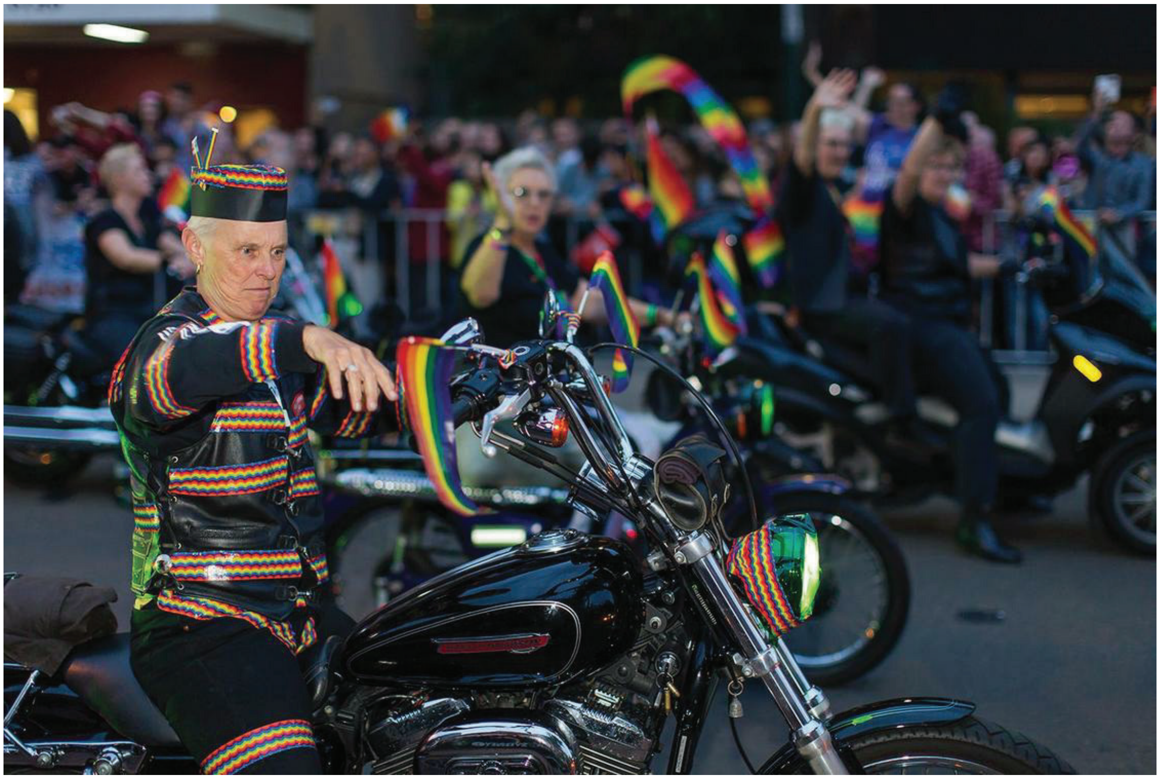

Figure 12.14 The idea that personal fulfillment through romantic love should be central to our identities allows for

a proliferation of gender identities. Here, members of Dykes on Bikes join with the hundreds of thousands celebrating the annual LGBTQIA+ Mardi Gras Parade in Sydney, Australia, on March 1, 2014. The Sydney parade is one of the largest LGBTQIA+ events in the world.

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This has happened and will almost certainly continue to happen in the United States and perhaps in most places in the world. Modernity has created social and economic conditions in which vast numbers of people believe that personal fulfillment rather than simply survival or preserving the family and ensuring its power should be a basic goal of life. In these circumstances, romantic love has become critical, and people expect sexual and emotional fulfillment through marriages and partnerships.

The idea that individuals should achieve happiness through fulfilling their potential is a fundamental part of the ideology of almost all current wealthy societies. Since the ideology (if not the reality) of all current wealthy nations also insists on the legal equality of all citizens, it is increasingly difficult to deny people the right to pursue love and happiness through whatever mechanism they see fit (if that mechanism does not cause obvious harm to others).

In 2014, the social media site Facebook allowed people to choose from among 50 gender identities. However, within a year, they determined that even this was insufficient and added 10 more customizable fields (Facebook, 2015). The idea that there are more than 50 genders would almost certainly have struck people in almost all societies as extremely strange only a quarter century ago. Certainly, it would have seemed very odd to earlier generations of Americans and Europeans. However, it’s important to remember that the idea of personal fulfillment as a critical life goal would also have seemed unusual to them. Arguably, the ability of individuals to pursue their own economic, social, and emotional desires and the achievement of satisfaction through deeply committed and emotionally engaged marriages and partnerships are great (though admittedly only partially achieved) triumphs of current-day society. The authors of this book, and probably most of the readers, hope for a day when all people can socially, economically, politically, and emotionally achieve their desires. However, it is well for us to remember that this liberation comes at a price. In earlier generations of almost all human societies, individuals were immersed in deep and powerful webs of kinship. Most lived in large families connected through systems of marriage and alliance. The greatly diminished size and social importance of our families have stripped us of most of these connections. We are far more free to express ourselves and become fully ourselves. However, we may be more isolated and lonelier as well.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE—HOW IMPORTANT IS WEALTH?

In 2021, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security published the third edition of its biennial report on global inclusion, justice, and security for women. The report included a ranking of 170 nations by their treatment of women. The ranking's first criterion was inclusion, based on measurements such as education and the number of women holding elected positions. The second was justice, which included criteria such as the extent to which there were legal restrictions on women that did not apply to men. And the third was security, which included the presence of armed conflict and the level of domestic violence. Some of the results of the study are listed in the following table:

Country Ranking in Women, Peace, and Security Index	Country	National Wealth Measured by Gross Domestic Product per Capita (World Bank), 2020
1	Norway	67,328
2	Finland	48,744

3	Iceland	59,270
4	Denmark	61,063
5	Luxembourg	116,014
6	Switzerland	87,097
7	Sweden	52,274
8	Australia	51,692
9	United Kingdom	41,059
10	Germany	46,208
11	Canada	43,294
159	Somalia	438
160	Palestine (West Bank and Gaza)	3,239
161	Sierra Leone	509
162	Sudan	486
163	Chad	659
163	DR Congo	543
165	South Sudan	1,119
166	Iraq	4,145
167	Pakistan	1,188
168	Yemen	758
169	Syria	1,334
170	Afghanistan	516

Several things about this chart stand out. First, the countries at the top of the chart are much wealthier than the countries at the bottom. The average yearly income of the top 10 nations is about $58,000. The average for the countries at the bottom is less than 10% of that dollar amount. Although all the nations at the top of the list are not physically in Europe, they are all part of a broadly European cultural sphere. All the countries at the bottom are in Africa and the Middle East. Third, active warfare persists in many of the countries at the bottom. And, last, many countries in which readers might be interested are neither in the top nor the bottom 10. Here are the rankings for some of those: Spain and France are numbers 14 and 15, respectively. Japan is number 35. The Russian Federation is number 53; Mexico, 88; China, 89; and India, 148.

The presence of so many European nations at the top of the list and Middle Eastern and African nations at the bottom may make anthropologists uneasy. It asks that we consider the possibility that the index measures the degree to which other nations conform to the behavioral expectations of wealthy European nations. Is the list an exercise in ethnocentrism? Perhaps. But that implies that we should treat things such as domestic violence and laws that systematically favor men over women as acceptable parts of culture in the places at the bottom of the list, a position that also makes anthropologists uncomfortable.

The strong correlation between wealth and women’s rights may fit with the decline in the importance of family, as previously discussed. It also suggests that perhaps the best thing that we can do to improve conditions for women is to improve conditions for everyone.

However, there is a caution here. Wealth may be a necessary precondition for women’s rights, but it’s certainly not sufficient to ensure them. Consider, for example, that Australia and Qatar have almost identical gross domestic product (GDP) per capita income (51,692 for Australia, 50,124 for Qatar). Australia ranks number 8 on the index while Qatar ranks number 97. Similarly, Tanzania has a GDP per capita of only 1,076 but, at number 73, ranks far better than nearby Botswana with a per capita income of 6,404 and a ranking of 118. There are many countries with high levels of wealth that do not rank as well as others that are far poorer. Slovenia and Slovakia are only about 125 miles away from each other (separated by Austria and Hungary) and have almost identical average incomes, but Slovenia is number 15 and Slovakia number 39. Similarly, Namibia and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) are both in southern Africa and have similar average incomes, but Namibia ranks at number 95 and Eswatini at number 146. Clearly, culture counts!

And what about the United States? The United States ranks number 21, well within the top 20% but well out of the top 10 and far below where it would be expected to rank based on wealth alone. Some of the things that kept the United States out of the top rankings were the low number of women elected to public office, the absence of laws mandating equal pay or paid maternity leave, and the high level of domestic and gun violence. The United States also ranks low on people's perception of safety. Forty-six percent of men say they feel safe walking alone in their community, but only 26% of women do (Dugan, 2014). This 20% gender gap is far greater than the global average of 7%.

You Decide

1. Do you believe that the United States should take legal and political steps to reduce the levels of inequality between men and women?
2. What specific cultural practices and beliefs might explain gender disparities between countries at similar income levels?
3. By placing all nations on a single scale, the index assumes that inclusion, justice, and security for women can be measured in a universally acceptable way. Do you believe that this is correct, or should there be different standards for different societies?

SUMMARY

1. What are the differences between sex, sexuality, and gender? Sex refers to biological differences between males and females. Sexuality refers to people's emotional and physical desires. Gender refers to the sex-related social and cultural roles that individuals play in society.
2. What does it mean to say that gender is culturally constructed?

People in all societies think that gender is the “natural” expression of underlying biological differences. However, anthropology shows that gender is learned and is shaped by society. We are born (mostly) with male or female genitalia, but our cultures teach us how to be men and women.

3. What is a gender ideology, and how is it expressed in society? A gender ideology is the totality of ideas about sex, gender, and the nature of men and women. Gender ideologies justify the distribution of power between members of different genders. Gender ideologies are expressed in many aspects of society, from stories to sports, games, and art.
4. How is proving manhood related to gender ideology, and how is it expressed in society? The idea of manhood as daring, heroic, and aggressive is widespread. The call for boys to “act like men” is found in almost all cultures. However, what it means to act like a man varies widely. Bullfighting in Spain provides an example of enacting maleness, one that stresses the ability to exert lethal violence in calm, rational, and artistic ways.
5. What role does control of female sexuality have in establishing gender hierarchies? Female sexuality is often perceived as dangerous to society. This justifies male control and feeds back into gender ideology. In many cases, control over women is inscribed on female bodies in dress and in physical alterations. However, private sexual violence also plays a large role. The #MeToo movement of 2017–2018 is a response to this violence and shows the increasing power of women.
6. How does cross-cultural evidence raise questions about the division of humanity into male and female? Although all cultures distinguish between masculine and feminine, some cultures also include alternative, in-between, or third-gender roles. These include the two-spirit role among Native Americans and the hijras of India.
7. Give some examples of the variability of sexual behavior. What is considered proper sexual behavior varies greatly among societies. For example, among the Sambia, boys become men through the oral and anal receipt of semen from other men. People on the Pacific Island of Mangaia engage in sex when they

are young. But on Inis Beag, men and women wait a very long time.

8. What are some theories of gender stratification? Early work in feminist anthropology assumed universal male dominance. However, more recent work shows that the position of women is extremely complex in most societies. Some factors that affect women's position are their frequent association with the domestic sphere rather than the public sphere and the fact that men often control more economic resources than women. More recent work focuses on gender variation and intersectionality: the ways in which sexuality and gender interact with factors such as race, class, and education.
9. What is the relationship between how societies produce their livelihoods and gender stratification? Although there is much variability, power differentials between men and women are related to the economic contributions of each gender and the degree to which these can be monetized. Men and women have substantial equality in foraging societies, but this diminishes in horticultural, pastoral, and agricultural societies where warfare and trade tend to lead to male dominance.
10. How has globalization affected gender relations? Because it involved monetizing societies and incorporating them as suppliers of raw materials to industry, most globalization increased men's status at the expense of women's. However, globalization also opened new possibilities for women and, as production shifts from the supply of raw materials to skilled factory jobs, may lead to reducing power differentials between men and women.
11. How has high population, urbanization, mobility, and increasing dependence on manufacturing and information affected family and gender? These factors (and others) have led to greatly reducing the importance of family, which has propelled a shift from marriages that focus on perpetuating family to marriages that focus on personal fulfillment. This shift has given love, romance, and sexuality greater roles in society and opened the possibilities for vastly increased numbers of gender identifications.
12. What is the relationship between women's rights and wealth? A

2017 survey shows a strong correlation between national wealth and women’s rights measured by inclusion, justice, and security. However, large differences in these factors in nations with similar incomes show that culture also plays a strong role.

Key Terms

gender ideology (p. 337)

gender roles (p. 335)

gender (p. 335)

hijab (p. 339)

hijra (p. 343)

intersectionality (p. 349)

intersex (p. 335)

private/public dichotomy (p. 348)

sex (p. 335)

sexuality (p. 335)

two-spirit (p. 345)

Notes

1. In February 2020, Weinstein was convicted of committing a criminal sex act in the first degree and rape in the third degree. He was later sentenced to 23 years in prison.

[2] Unsurprisingly, there is substantial controversy about the anthropological study of sexuality and the accuracy of the anthropological reporting of sexual behavior. For a review of some of the issues involved, see Beth M Ahlberg, “Is There a Distinct African Sexuality? A Critical Response of Caldwell.” In *Africa*. 64(2): 220-242. 1994.

PART IV SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS

13 RELIGION

Dancers celebrate the Virgen del Carmen festival in Pisac, in the Sacred Valley of the Inca in Peru. During the festival, dancers wear different masks. Some masks satirize Peru’s colonial rulers or elites from the later Republican era. Others represent native people, and often the brutalities inflicted on them. There are masks that represent freed African slaves, and still others that represent different types of spirits.

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Learning Objectives

1. Analyze how religion is related to order and meaning in life and the way it relates to social order.
2. Describe elements of religion, including sacred narrative, symbols and supernatural beings, states, and powers.
3. Distinguish religious practices, including rites of passage, rites of intensification, prayer, magic, and divination.
4. Distinguish different types of religious practitioners.
5. Evaluate the role that religion plays in social change.
6. Summarize the characteristics of fundamentalism and discuss its relation to social change.
7. Evaluate the state of religion in U.S. society.

In Trinidad, before harvesting, farmers make sacrifices to the *di*, the spirits of the first owners of their fields. They believe that failure to do so will result in a poor harvest. Because absentee landlords own many fields, farmers also set aside a portion of the harvest to pay rent. Most people from industrialized societies would say that sacrifices to the *di* are supernatural and rent payments are part of the natural world. But is it really so simple? After all, as anthropologist Morton Klass (1995) pointed out, the farmer may have never seen either a *di* or the landlord. He knows of people who have been evicted because they failed to pay the rent, but he also knows people whose crops have failed when they did not sacrifice to the *di*. Some people say that the *di* do not exist, but others say that landlords do not exist and everyone has a right to the land on which they live and work. If we assume that the payments the farmer makes to the *di* are part of religion and those he makes to the landlord have nothing to do with religion, we seem to miss something essential.

All societies have spiritual beliefs and practices, and anthropologists generally refer to these as religion. However, as Klass's example of the *di* and the landlord suggests, defining religion is surprisingly difficult because not all societies make the same distinctions between the natural and supernatural in the same way as most Americans. It is unlikely that all the world's people share any single belief. Differences vary on issues as grand as the nature of life itself (for example, whether we live once, as the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition teaches, or repeatedly, as the Hindu and Buddhist traditions teach) and as specific as sexual relations between men (discouraged by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition but, as discussed in Chapter 12, compulsory among the Sambia of Papua New Guinea [Herdt, 1987]).

Despite the bewildering variety of religious beliefs and practices, there is something that anthropologists (though not necessarily the members of the society) identify as religion in every society. Although it is very difficult to formulate a concise definition of **religion**, we can say that all religions share at least six characteristics. First, religions are composed of stories that members believe are important. Second, religions make extensive use of symbols and symbolism. Third, religions propose the existence of beings, powers, states, places, and qualities that cannot be measured by any agreed-upon scientific means. Fourth, religions include rituals and specific means of addressing the supernatural. Fifth, there are individuals in all societies who are particularly expert in the practice of religion. And, lastly, like other aspects of culture, all religions are subject to change.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many anthropologists were concerned with trying to find the origin of religion and trace its development. E. B. Tylor, one of the founders of anthropology, saw religion as beginning with **animism**, the belief that all objects (living and nonliving) are imbued with spirit. Tylor hypothesized that religion evolved from animism to polytheism and then to monotheism. Tylor and many of his contemporaries thought the evolution of religion was part of the more general human progression toward logic and rationality. This view of religion has long been discredited; no religion is any more or less logical than any other, and none is more evolved than another. Although some anthropologists today still puzzle over the origins of religion, most are more concerned with how it operates in societies and how it creates meaning in human life. In this chapter, we will briefly discuss some of the things that religion does in society before turning to a more thorough examination of each of the six points enumerated previously.

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

Religion has many functions in society. It may provide meaning and order in people’s lives. It may reduce social anxiety and give people a sense of control over their destinies. It may promote and reinforce the status quo. But it does not always do these things. In some cases, religion may make people profoundly disquiet or fearful. It may be an important force in resisting the status quo, and it may catalyze radical politics and, sometimes, murderous violence.

Searching for Order and Meaning

From a purely materialist, objective point of view, the world appears to lack any purpose or meaning. However, human beings seem ill suited to live in such a world. Even in desperate situations, in which all hope and reason seem gone, humans strive to find meaning, and they survive better when they find it. For example, psychologist Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, found that those whose lives retained meaning, even in the camps, were more likely to retain their sanity and to survive than those whose lives lost meaning. Frankl came to believe that taking responsibility for finding meaning under all circumstances was a central task of life (1962, p. 113).

There are many possible ways to give one's life meaning, but religion is historically and cross-culturally the principal means that people have used. In a sense, religions are models of reality that serve as a framework for interpreting events and experiences. Through religion, humans impose order and meaning on their world and often gain the feeling that they have some measure of control over it (Figure 13.1).

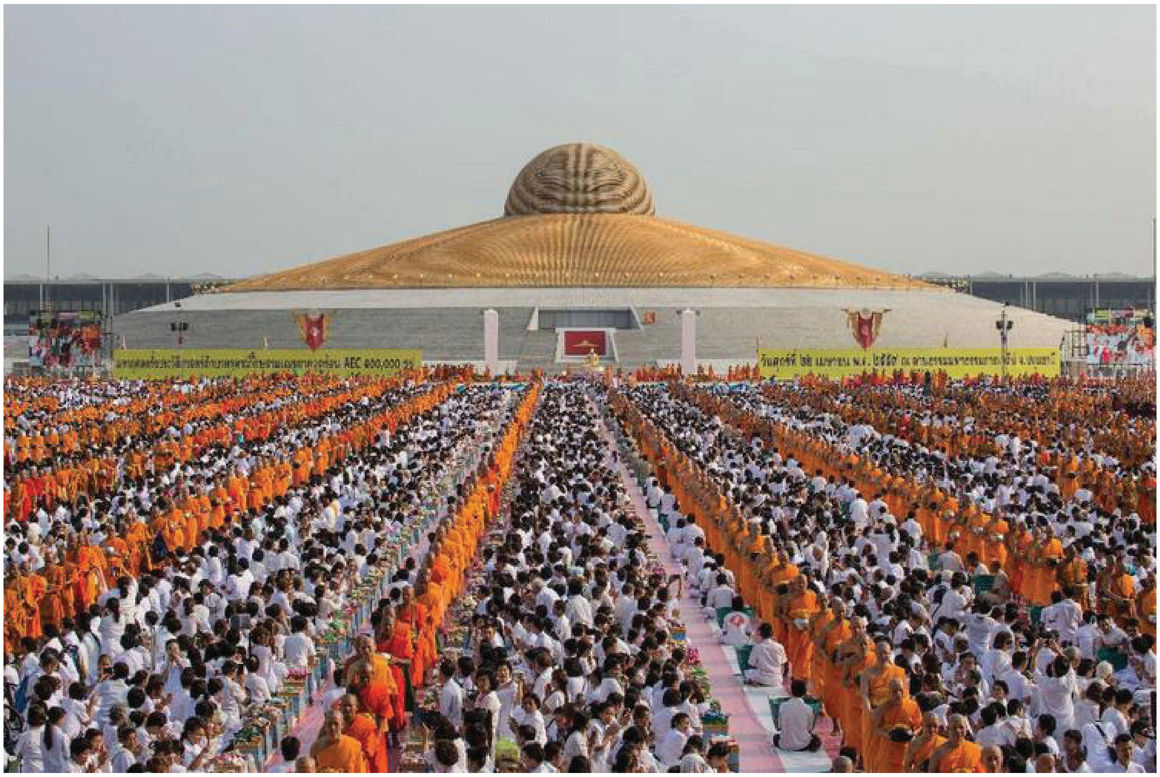

Figure 13.1 Over 100,000 Buddhist monks and novices gather at Wat Dhammakaya Temple to mark Earth Day 2016. Their event focused on giving generously and observance of the precepts of Buddhism.

Guillaume Payen/LightRocket via Getty Images

Although there is no single question answered by every religion, belief systems all respond to some of the central concerns of their believers. Religions provide **cosmologies**—sets of principles or beliefs about the nature of life and death, the creation of the universe, the origin of society, the relationship of individuals and groups to one another, and the relation of humankind to nature. Cosmologies give meaning to the lives of believers. Cosmologies provide explanations and justifications for critical aspects of the physical and social environment.

By defining the place of the individual in society and through the establishment of moral codes, religions provide people with a sense of personal identity, belonging, and meaning. When people suffer a profound personal loss or when life loses meaning because of radically changed circumstances, religion can supply a new identity and become the basis for personal and cultural survival.

All of this may make it sound like religion is a force for peace and tranquility, and often it is. However, this is not always the case. Beliefs give meaning to people's lives in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes this involves denying the physical reality or importance of the material world, even to the point of suicidal individual or group action (as in the cases of The People's Temple, Heaven's Gate, and the Branch Davidians, all groups whose members' beliefs led directly to their deaths).[1] Sometimes models of meaning include unspeakable violence practiced on other people. Sometimes meaning is found in oppressing or murdering others. The meanings that religion creates can be a chaotic wilderness of violence and destruction.

Reducing Anxiety and Increasing Control

Many religious practices are aimed at ensuring success in human activities. Prayers, sacrifice, and magic are often used in the hope that they will aid a particular person or community. Rituals are performed to call on supernatural beings and to control forces that appear to be unpredictable. Although such practices are widespread, their presence is usually related to risk. The less predictable an outcome is, the greater the likelihood these will be used. For example, professional baseball players in the United States rarely use magical practices in outfielding, for which there is little uncertainty, but often use magic for hitting and pitching, the least predictable aspects of the game. When All-Star shortstop Nomar Garciaparra came to bat, after every pitch, he stepped out of the batter's box, kicked the dirt, adjusted his gloves, and touched his helmet. Pitcher Turk Wendell had many rituals, including wearing a necklace made of the teeth of animals he had hunted (Gmelch, 2009, p. 195). Wendell's rituals were pretty odd, but many of us do similar things. If you have studied for a test and know the material well, you are unlikely to spend much time praying for success. But you're more likely to pray if you have not studied, and you may even bring your lucky pencil or another charm to the test.

Experiments show that praying or doing magic to help or hurt an individual has no effect if that person does not know about your prayers or magical activities (see Flamm, 2002; Tessman & Tessman, 2000). When such attempts are known, they may have an effect, altering the emotional state of the individuals involved. A large-scale study of prayer showed that people who knew that others were praying for their recovery had more complications than those who did not (Benson et al., 2006). This may have been the result of the expectations that the prayers created (Carey, 2006). So, bringing your lucky pencil to an exam may give you added confidence and improve your performance, or it may create expectations that lead to poor performance.

Reinforcing or Changing the Social Order

Religion is closely connected with the survival of society and generally works to preserve the social order. Through religion, beliefs about good and evil are reinforced by supernatural means of social control. Sacred stories and rituals provide a rationale for the present social order and give social values sacred authority. Religious ritual also intensifies social solidarity by creating an atmosphere in which people experience their common identity in emotionally moving ways. Finally, religion is an important educational institution, inculcating the values and understandings central to the culture. Initiation rites, for example, almost always include the transmission of information about cultural practices and traditions.

In reinforcing the social order, religion often serves the interests of the powerful. Religions generally teach that the supernatural gives wealth and power to certain individuals, families, or social groups. Thus, any attack on wealth and power is an attack on the supernatural. An example of this was the divine right of kings in Europe, which was the notion that kings derived their right to rule directly from God. If this is held to be true, then kings are not subject to the will of those they govern, and attacks against them are attacks against God. The English king James I (1556–1625) wrote, “God gives not kings the style of Gods in vain, for on his throne his Scepter do they sway” (Internet Archive, n.d.). In other words, kings speak for God, and defiance of the king is defiance of God.

However, religion may serve the powerless as well. At times, religion provides an escape from a grim political reality. Through the religious belief in a glorious future or the coming of a savior, powerless people who live in harsh and deprived circumstances can create an illusion of power. Under such conditions, religion provides an outlet for frustration, resentment, and anger. It can serve to drain off energy that might otherwise be futilely (and perhaps fatally) turned against overwhelmingly powerful social systems. In this way, religion contributes indirectly to maintaining the social order.

Religion might also challenge the social order and be a catalyst for change. English monarchs may have believed that they ruled in God’s name, but those who challenged them also used religion to justify their actions. For example, the priest John Ball, one of the leaders of the English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, asked, “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” In other words, Adam and Eve worked as equals, and so should we all.

When the image of the social order that a religion presents fails to correspond to the daily experience of its followers, prophets may emerge who create new religious ideas or call for a purification of existing practices. Sometimes prophecies encourage people to invest themselves in purely magical practices that have little real effect on the social order. At other times, however, prophets call on their followers to pursue their goals through political or military means, which may result in rapid social change. The American civil rights movement, the Iranian revolution, the rise of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and the conflict between Pakistan and India over the state of Kashmir are all examples of social movements in which religion has played a critical role.

BELIEFS: STORIES, SYMBOLS, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

All religions include a series of beliefs and statements about the nature of the world. These are often found in the stories that form the basis of religions, in the symbols that are integral to them, and in their ideas about the nature of the supernatural. In some cases, beliefs are taken as clear statements about the nature of reality. In others, they are treated as metaphors that allow people to see deep, often hidden aspects of the world. In still others, they may be held to have both objective and metaphoric reality. The importance of religion varies among individuals in every society; there is probably no place where everyone believes equally. However, for many, the stories, symbols, and supernatural personalities of their beliefs are critical to how they view and live in the world.

Sacred Narratives

At a fundamental level, all religions consist of a series of stories told by members of a group. These **sacred narratives** are powerful ways of communicating religious ideas. The narratives sometimes have a sacred power in themselves that is evoked when they are told or acted out. Sacred narratives may speak of magical or miraculous times, may explain aspects of the world, and/or may recall historic events. They are often clothed in poetic and sometimes esoteric language.

Sacred narratives are often called **myths**, but this is problematic. In some ways, it seems appropriate to use the term *myth*. When we think of myth, we think of stories of great deeds; origin stories of people, the world, or particular worldly practices; and stories of heroes such as Athena or Hercules—stories where time is compressed or expanded and reality is composed of many levels. These are indeed characteristics of religious stories. However, we also use the word *myth* to denote a false belief or a religious belief we do not share. Thus, we are likely to claim that our own religion is composed of history and sacred stories, but other people have myths. For example, we may say that Christians, Jews, and Muslims have Bible stories, but ancient Greeks or Native Americans have myths. We should apply the same terminology to the religious beliefs of others that we apply to our own. It is good to remember that the ancient Greeks were just as convinced of the truth of their sacred narratives as modern-day Christians, or believers in any current religious tradition, are of their own.

By explaining that things came to be the way they are because of the activities of sacred beings, sacred narratives validate or legitimize beliefs, values, customs, and practices (Figure 13.2). As Bronislaw Malinowski pointed out, there is an intimate connection between the sacred tales of a society and its ritual acts, moral deeds, and social organization. Malinowski wrote that these stories are not merely idle tales “but a hard-worked active force.” He explained that “the function of myth … is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events” (1992, p. 146).

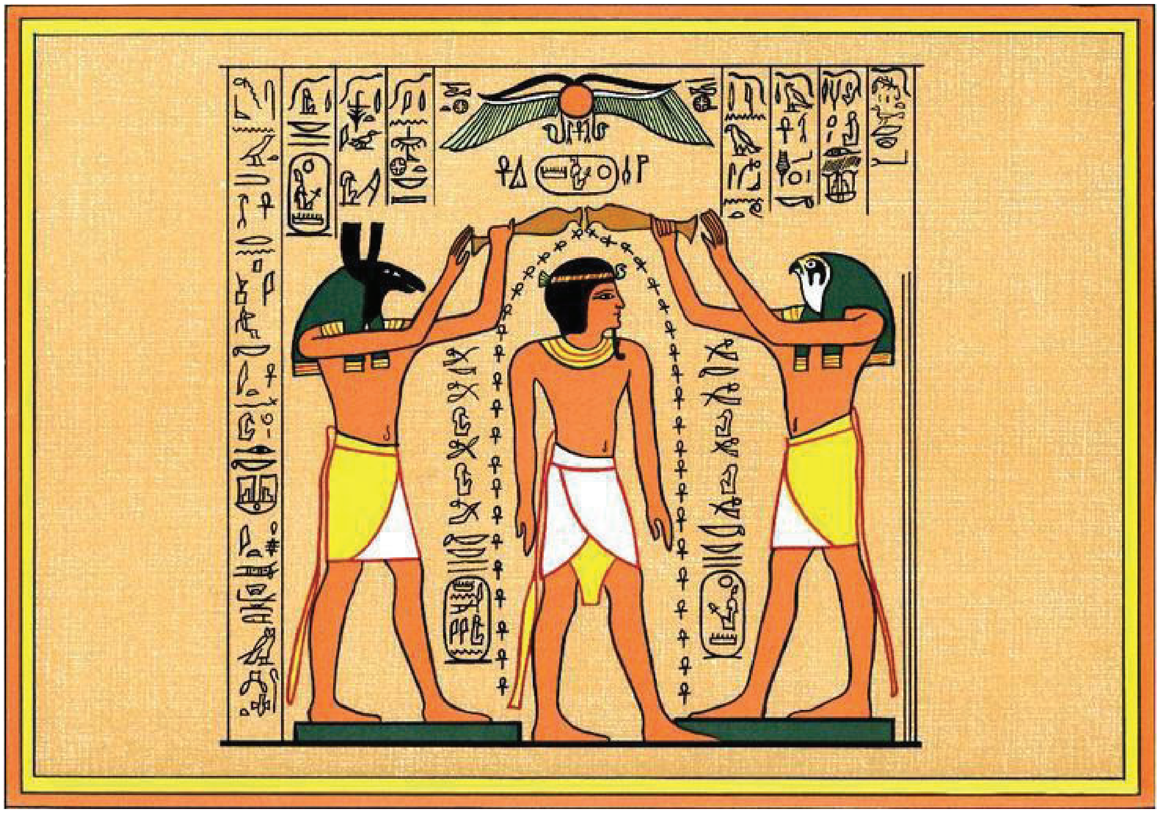

Figure 13.2 Religious narratives legitimize beliefs and social arrangements. In this image, the gods Set (left) and Horus (right) crown Pharaoh Seti I (ruled 1294–1279 BCE).

Ivy Close Images / Alamy Stock Photo

A clear example of what Malinowski meant is provided by a portion of the origin narrative of the Hopi, an agricultural people who live in Arizona and New Mexico. Traditionally, blue corn was the staple of their diet. Blue corn is more difficult to grow than most other varieties, but it is a strong, resistant strain. Hopi life is difficult; the Hopi say, “It is hard to be a Hopi but good to be a Hopi” (Loftin, 1991, p. 5).

Through the growing of blue corn, the Hopi reexperience the creation of their world. According to Hopi belief, in the distant past, they lived underground as earlier, imperfect creations. Just before the Hopi appeared on the earth’s surface, they were given their choice of subsistence activities. They chose blue corn and were given the *sooya*, or digging stick, to plant it. The techniques for farming blue corn were established by the god Maasaw, who taught the Hopi to treat the earth respectfully, as a relative. The Hopi believe the actions of farming blue corn re-create the feelings of humility and harmony that the ancestors chose when they selected this food. Before the 20th century, the Hopi farmed their fields in work groups made up of clan members. Because their tradition holds that clans were given land to farm together as they became members of the tribe, Hopi reexperience the settlement of their land by various clans as they farm (Loftin, 1991, pp. 5–9).

It is easy to see how the Hopi creation story serves as a charter for society. The Hopi live their religious understanding of their world as they grow blue corn. The telling of such stories and the actions that accompany or are implied in them reinforce social tradition and enhance solidarity.

Symbols and Symbolism

As the tale of Hopi blue corn shows, religious stories make critical use of symbolism. Blue corn is more than just a type of food, it symbolizes the Hopi people. Religious symbolism may be expressed in sacred narratives and material objects such as the cross, the Star of David, the crescent moon and star of Islam, or images of the Buddha or of Krishna. Masks, statues, paintings, costumes, body decorations, or objects in the physical environment may also be used as symbols. In addition, religions frequently use verbal symbols. The names of gods and spirits as well as certain words, phrases, or songs are often believed to be powerful.

Religious symbols pack many different and sometimes contradictory meanings into a single word, idea, or object. Consider the Christian cross. Christians have been pondering the meaning of the cross for most of the past 2,000 years. Among its meanings are death, love, sacrifice, identity, history, power, weakness, wealth, poverty, and many more. It represents all these things simultaneously. Christians do not agree on a single set of meanings for the cross, and in history, disputes about its meaning have often been violent. Disagreement about meaning is also a common characteristic of symbols.

Because it carries so many meanings, the cross has enormous emotional and intellectual power for Christians. As a result, it can be used in leadership. For example, the cross was a prominent military symbol from 312 CE, when the Roman emperor Constantine ordered his soldiers to paint it on their shields (Nicholson, 2000, p. 158), until the 20th century, when it was a frequent feature of military insignia and propaganda in World Wars I and II. Desecration of the cross may inflame passions and provoke very strong reactions.

Symbolic representation can allow people to grasp the often complex and abstract ideas of religion without much concern for the specifics of theology that underlie them. For example, the ritual of the Eucharist, in which Christians consume wine and wafer, symbolizes the Christian Bible story of the Last Supper and communicates the abstract idea of communion with god. This idea is present in other religions but is represented by different symbolism. For instance, in Hinduism, one of the most popular representations of communion with a god is the love between the divine Krishna, in the form of a cowherd, and the *gopis*, or milkmaids, who are devoted to him (Figure 13.3). In some places, the spring festival of *Holi* celebrates Krishna's relationship with the milkmaid Radha.[2] In both cases, there are complex theological arguments and disagreements about the exact nature of the rituals and the relationship between people and god. However, in the dramatic enactments of the stories of the Last Supper and Krishna and the *gopis*, Christianity and Hinduism offer paths to communion with god that ordinary people can understand.

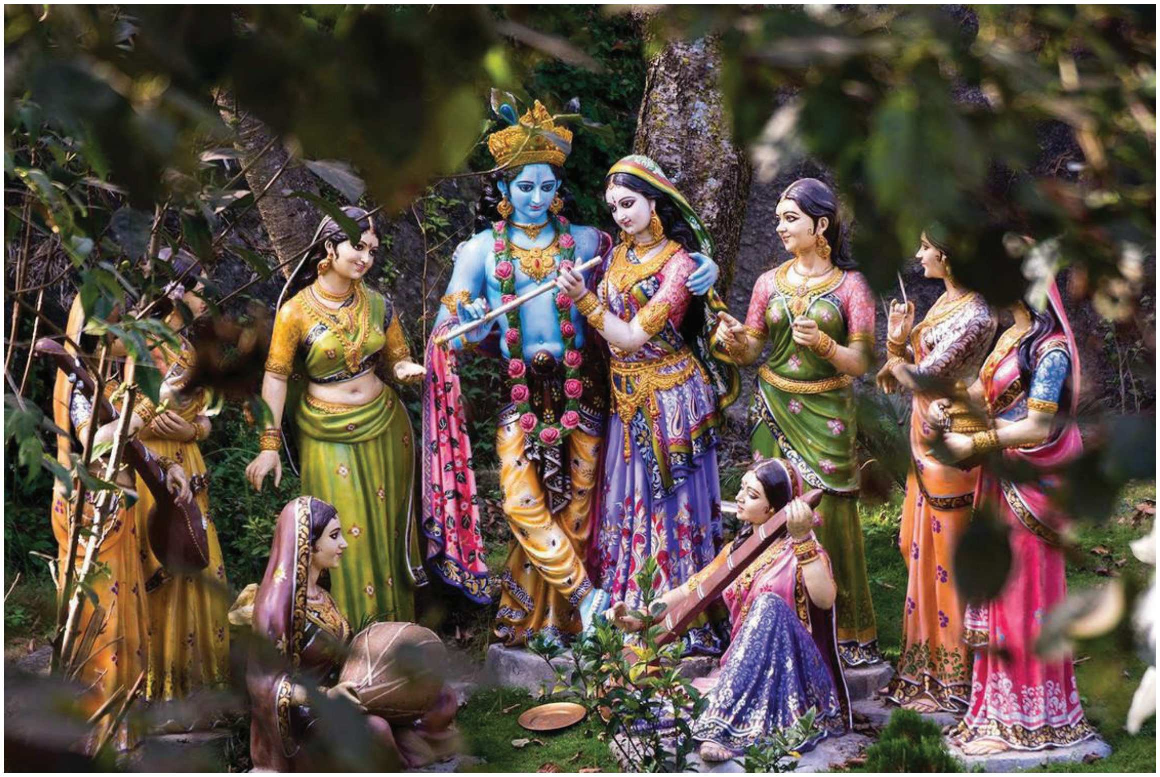

Figure 13.3 Religious symbols may allow people to grasp complex ideas. Here, Krishna dances with one of the *gopis* (milkmaids), symbolizing communion with the gods.

iStockphoto.com/Kumud Parajuli

Supernatural Beings, Powers, States, and Qualities

A great many important religious narratives and symbols concern the world of spirits and sacred powers. Although many religions do not separate the natural from the supernatural, all propose that there are important beings, powers, states, or qualities that exist apart from human beings. These beings, powers, states, and qualities are nonempirical. That is, there is no scientifically agreed-upon way to measure their presence. Consider the god of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic tradition. Many religious people claim to see proof of god’s existence everywhere. However, there is nothing that members of all religious traditions as well as those who do not believe could agree upon to measure the presence of god. Thus, science, which depends on such empirical measurement, can neither prove nor disprove the existence of god. God is nonempirical.

Most religions populate the world with nonempirical beings or spirits. Such spirits may be anthropomorphic, or human in form; zoomorphic, or animal in form; or naturalistic, associated with features of the natural environment.

Spirits can act in the material world. They can be happy or unhappy, stingy or generous, or experience any other human emotion. The understanding of the spirits and souls of animals in hunting societies provides a good illustration. Among the Netsilik Inuit, the souls of bears, caribou, and seals were particularly important. The Netsilik believed that if the soul of an animal they killed received the proper religious attention, it would be pleased. Such an animal would reincarnate in another animal body and let the same hunter kill it again. In this sense, a hunter who properly treated the spirits of the animals he killed would always hunt and kill the same animals. An animal soul that did not receive proper attention, however, would be angered and would not let itself be killed a second time. As a result, the hunt would fail. Particularly offended animal souls might become bloodthirsty monsters and terrorize people (Balikci, 1970, pp. 200–201).

The term **god** is generally used for a named spirit who is believed to have created or to control some aspect of the world. In some religions, gods are of central importance, but this is not always the case. High gods—that is, gods understood as the creator of the world and as the ultimate power in it—are present in only about half of all societies (Levinson, 1996, p. 229). In about one third of these societies, such gods are distant, are withdrawn, and have little interest in people. Prayer to them is unnecessary. An example is the creator god of the Igbo of Nigeria. Like other remote gods, he is accessible only through prayer to lesser spirits (Uchendu, 1965, p. 94).

A religion may be **polytheistic** (having many gods) or **monotheistic** (having only one god). However, the difference between these two is not always clear-cut. In polytheistic religions, the many gods may be different aspects of one god. Among Hindus, for example, it is said that there are millions of gods, yet all Hindus understand that in some way, these gods are all aspects of a single divine essence. Conversely, in monotheistic religions, the one god may have several aspects. In Roman Catholicism, for example, there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, yet Catholics understand these as parts of a single, unitary god.

One class of spirit that may be singled out for special treatment is the trickster. **Trickster** spirits come in many guises, but their key characteristic is that they are more interested in their own benefit than that of human beings. Some tricksters, such as the Christian Devil, are personifications of evil. Others are much more sympathetic. They often combine attributes such as greed, lust, and envy with humor and wisdom. Tricksters are powerful, but they are often fooled. In African religions, monkey, spider, and hyena spirits are often tricksters. In many Native American cultures, the key trickster spirit is Coyote (Figure 13.4).

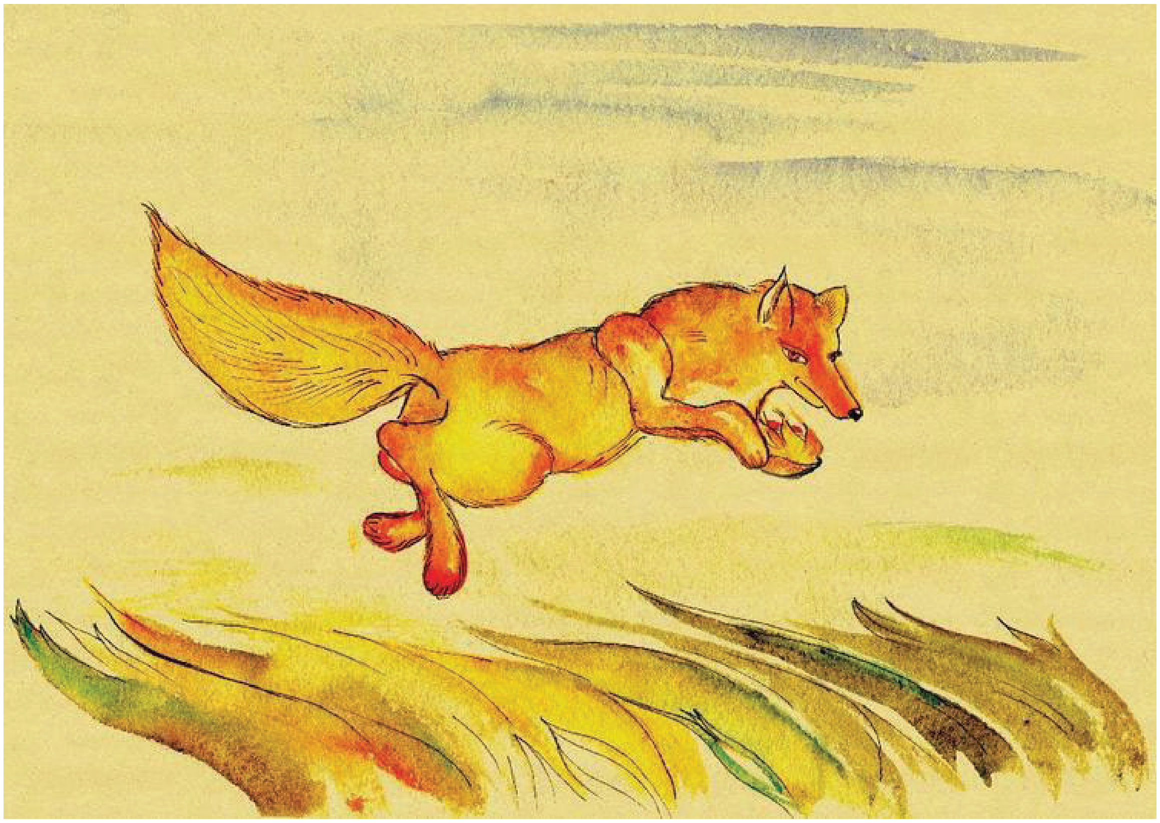

Figure 13.4 Trickster spirits combine attributes such as greed, lust, and envy with humor and wisdom. Here, Coyote tricks the Fire Beings to steal fire from them in a widely told Native American tale.

Shutterstock/Rashevska Nataliia

In addition to nonempirical or supernatural beings, religions also posit the existence of states, qualities, or powers whose existence cannot be scientifically measured. Enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition is a state of being that is not subject to measurement. In another example, groups such as the Society for Ethical Culture, a nontheistic religion established by Felix Adler in the late 19th century, search for Truth, a quality whose objective description has eluded philosophers for millennia.

Religious beliefs often include the notion of an impersonal spiritual force that infuses the universe. In the early 20th century, R. R. Marett

(1866–1943) coined the term **animatism** to refer to this force. Today, it is probably best known as **mana**. Mana may be concentrated in individuals or objects. For example, as noted in Chapter 7, chiefs in Tahiti had a much higher degree of mana than ordinary people. Mana gives one spiritual power, but it can also be dangerous and is therefore often associated with an elaborate system of taboos, or prohibitions. Mana is like electricity; it is a powerful force, but it can be dangerous when not approached with the proper caution. Mana is also non-emperical.

Mana is most often found in spatial, temporal, verbal, or physical locations that are the boundaries between clear-cut categories. For example, in many cultures, hair is believed to contain supernatural power (as in the Bible story of Samson and Delilah). Hair is a symbol of the boundary between the self and the not-self, both part of a person and separable from the person. Doorways and gates, which separate the inside from the outside and can thus serve as symbols of moral categories such as good and evil or pure and impure, are also considered to contain power in many religions. Because these boundary symbols contain supernatural power, they are often used in religious rituals and surrounded by taboos.

PRACTICES: ADDRESSING THE SUPERNATURAL

Sacred narratives, symbols, spirits, and sacred power all find their place in religious rituals. A **ritual** is a ceremonial act or a repeated stylized gesture used for specific occasions (Cunningham et al., 1995). A religious ritual connects the people practicing it to the supernatural as they understand it. Through ritual, people enact their religion. Rituals may involve the telling or acting out of sacred stories as well as the use of music, dance, drugs, or pain to move worshippers to an ecstatic state of trance.

The specific content of religious rituals—the stories and symbols they use and the spirits and powers they address—varies enormously from culture to culture. However, certain patterns of religious behavior are extremely widespread, if not universal. Most religious rituals involve a combination of prayer, sacrifices, and magic to contact and control supernatural spirits and powers. In addition, rites of passage and rites of intensification are found in almost all cultures.

The Power of the Liminal

The word **liminal** refers to those objects, places, people, and statuses that are understood as existing in an indeterminate state between clear-cut categories. Objects that are liminal, such as the hair and doorways described earlier, often play important roles in religious rituals.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) wrote that rituals frequently generate liminal states and statuses in which the structured and hierarchical classifications that normally separate people into groups such as caste, class, or kinship categories are temporarily dissolved. Because of this, in ritual, people can behave in ways that would be clearly unacceptable under other circumstances. In some cases, this includes role reversals. For example, many Japanese festivals include ritual transvestism, where community members dance in the clothing of the opposite sex (Norbeck, 1974, p. 51). In the Wubwang’u ritual among the Ndembu of Zambia, men and women publicly insult each other’s sexual abilities and extol their own, but no one is allowed to take offense (Turner, 1969, pp. 78–79). Ritual role reversals include class as well as gender. In Holi, the Hindu spring harvest festival, members of the lower class and castes traditionally throw colored powder (and in the old days, excrement and urine) at males of the middle and upper classes. Today the holiday has changed so that everyone is likely to throw colored powder at everyone else (Figure 13.5).

Figure 13.5 At the popular festival of Holi, roles can be reversed. Members of lower castes can throw colored powder (and in earlier times, more noxious materials) at anyone. Here a child throws powder in Bangalore, India, in March 2018.

iStockphoto.com/THEPALMER

More controversially, Turner argued that people in liminal states experience a state of equality and oneness he called **communitas**. In communitas, the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless are, for a short time, all equals.

In state-level societies, institutionalized liminal statuses sometimes emerge. Organizations such as monasteries and convents where people live permanently as members of a religious community embody liminality. Although members of religious communities may have high status, liminal groups often have low status and an ambiguous nature. This is illustrated by the hijras of India, whose sexual ambiguity contains the power both to bless and to curse.

Anthropologists often refer to rituals and statuses involving liminality as antistructure. Although all societies must be structured to provide order and meaning, according to Turner (1969, p. 131), **antistructure**—the temporary ritual dissolution of the established order—is also important, helping people to more fully realize the oneness of the self and the other.

Though Turner’s ideas are provocative, they are also controversial. In a stratified society, the powerful person in a ritual may feel or claim to feel great unity with the powerless. It is not clear that the powerless share this feeling. Even if they do, they need to be far more cautious in saying so: The aristocrat may freely claim to feel at one with the peasant, but it is likely to be dangerous for a peasant to say they feel at one with an aristocrat.

Rites of Passage

A public event that marks the transition of a person from one social status to another is known as a **rite of passage**. Rites of passage almost always mark birth, puberty, marriage, and death and may mark many other transitions as well. Rites of passage involve three phases (van Gennep, 1960/1909). The first phase is separation, in which the person or group is detached from a former status. The second phase is transition and is often characterized by liminality. The individual in this phase has been detached from their old status but is not yet attached to a new one. The third stage is reincorporation, in which the passage from one status to another is symbolically completed. After reincorporation, the person takes on the rights and obligations of their new social status.

In many societies, people undergo rites of passage as they move from childhood to adulthood. Other rites of passage effect similar changes in status. Baptisms and ceremonies around birth move the new child from the status of not-a-community-member to membership in the community. Quinceañeras mediate between the status of childhood and that of young womanhood, eligible for dating. Marriages mediate between single and couple status. Funerals mediate between the living and the dead.

Basic training for military service is an example of a rite of passage with which many Americans are familiar. In basic training, recruits are separated from their friends, families, and places of origin. They are taken to military posts where they are given identical haircuts and identical uniforms. All signs of differences among them are minimized. No matter their position in life before joining the military, ideally, they are treated identically during training. The training itself involves a wide variety of rigorous exercises and tasks designed to impart knowledge and build trust and camaraderie. In this state, the recruits experience communitas, a shared identity along with the breaking down of barriers between individuals. Training ends with a large ceremony that reintegrates the recruits—now soldiers—into society with a new identity.

Rites of Intensification

In addition to rites of passage, most societies have **rites of intensification**. These are rituals directed toward the welfare of the group or community rather than the individual. These rituals are structured to reinforce the values and norms of the community and to strengthen group identity. Through rites of intensification, the community maintains continuity with the past, enhances the feeling of social unity in the present, and renews the sentiments on which cohesion depends (Elkin, 1967).

In some groups, rites of intensification are associated with totems. A **totem** is an object, an animal species, or a feature of the natural world that is associated with a descent group. **Totemism** is a prominent feature of the religions of the Australian Aborigines. In Aboriginal society, people are grouped into societies or lodges, each of which is linked with a plant or animal that is its totem and which they are usually forbidden to eat. Members of societies or lodges come together to celebrate their totems in religious rituals. The ceremonies explain the origin of the totem (and, hence, of the group) and reenact the time of the ancestors. Through singing and dancing, both performers and onlookers are transported to an ecstatic state. In a classic description, French sociologist Émile Durkheim wrote,

> When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation.… On every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort.… One can readily conceive how, when arrived at this state … a man does not recognize himself any longer … [and feels] himself dominated and carried away by some sort of external power.… Everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world. (1961/1915, pp. 247–251)

Thus, in dance and worship, the Aborigines achieved an ecstatic religious experience of their shared identity. Durkheim argued that such experiences helped to bind the members of society together. For Durkheim, totems were symbols of common social identity. When people worshipped them, they were, at the same time, worshipping the moral and social order of their society.

The religious rituals of the Australian Aborigines may seem exotic, but Americans participate in similar observances all the time—and to the same effect. Some American rites of intensification are religious, but many are secular. One with which most students are familiar is the college football game and the rallies associated with it. If the game is “good” or the school has “spirit,” these gatherings produce enormous excitement among their fans and transport them to “a special world,” as Durkheim called it. They also increase collective identity. If you are a fan, you will probably feel intense identification with your school and your team at such an event. Identification with your team and the excitement of sporting events will help to keep you loyal to your school (and hopefully encourage you to donate to it as an alumnus/a). Schools have totems (animal mascots) as well (Figure 13.6).

Figure 13.6 Rites of intensification strengthen group identity and are found in both religious and secular life. Football can be a formidable rite of intensification for college students … and college mascots bear some resemblance to religious totems. Here, the University of Iowa’s mascot, Herky the Hawk, is seen at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA in 2016.

Icon Sports Wire / Contributor via Getty Images

Prayer

Any conversation held with spirits and gods is **prayer**. In prayer, people petition, invoke, praise, give thanks, dedicate, supplicate, intercede, confess, repent, and bless (Levinson, 1996). Prayer may be done without any expectation of a response from the beings or forces prayed to. However, prayer often involves making requests of the supernatural. In these cases, the failure of a spirit to respond to a request is understood as resulting from its disinclination rather than from improper human action. Thus, a critical feature of prayer is that people believe its results depend on the will of the spirit world rather than on actions humans perform.

When Westerners think of prayer, most probably think of words that are recited aloud or silently. However, there are many forms of prayer. For example, in Buddhist tradition, people may pray by hoisting flags or spinning wheels with prayers written inside them (Figure 13.7). Words addressed to gods and spirits are not always humble compliments either. For example, Benedict (1961/1934, p. 221) reported that when calamities fell among the Northwest Coast tribes of North America or their prayers were not answered, people vented their anger against the gods by saying, “You are a great slave.”

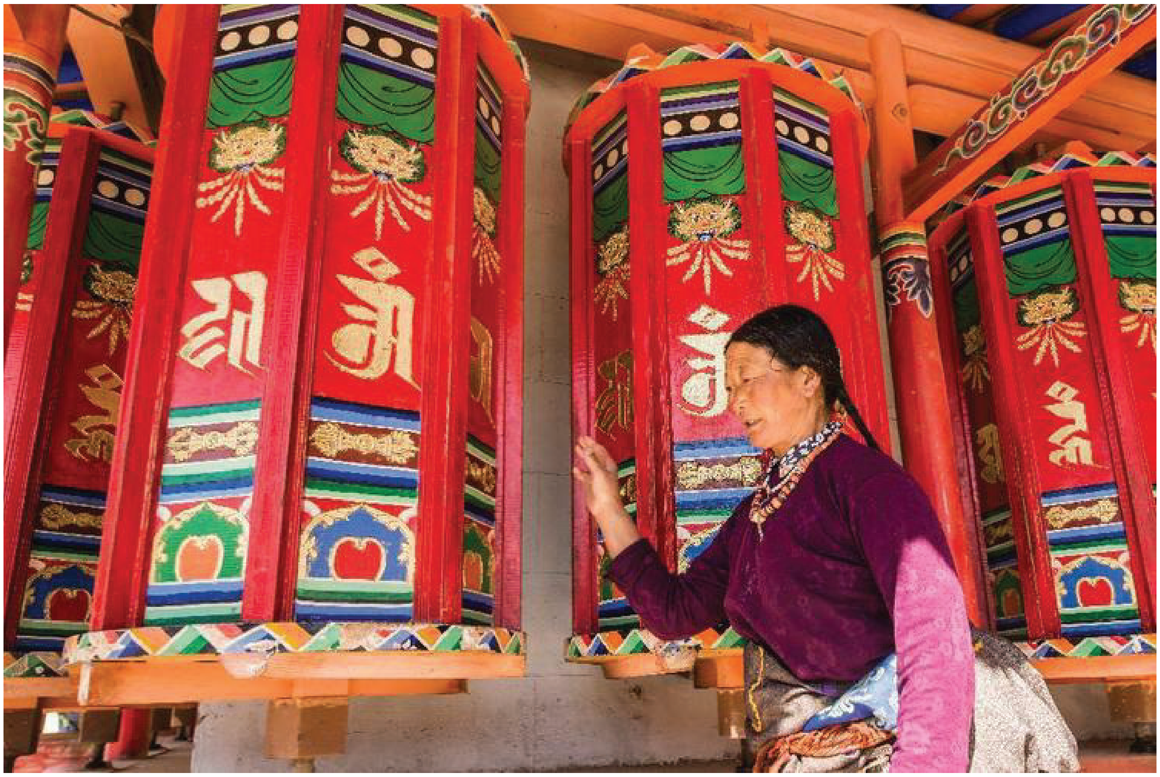

Figure 13.7 There are many styles of prayer. In Buddhism, praying by spinning wheels with prayers written on them is common. Here, a woman spins prayer

wheels at Langmusi monastery in Tibet, in 2014.

istockphoto.com/guenterguni

Sacrifice

Sacrifice occurs when people make offerings to gods or spirits to increase their spiritual purity or the efficacy of their prayers. People may sacrifice the first fruits of a harvest, animal lives, or, on occasion, human lives. Changes in behavior are also often offered as sacrifices. Many Americans are familiar with the practice of giving up something for the Christian holiday of Lent, a form of sacrifice intended to help the worshipper identify with Jesus, show devotion, and increase purity. In many religions, including Christianity, it is common to make a vow to carry out a certain kind of behavior, such as going on a pilgrimage or building a place of worship, if a request for divine assistance is answered.

Some sacrifices may have important material functions. For example, the essence of the East African cattle complex, as practiced by groups such as the Nuer and the Pokot, is that cattle are killed and eaten only in a ritual context. This is clearly adaptive. In the absence of refrigeration, animals must be consumed rapidly after they are slaughtered. One family cannot consume a whole steer by itself, but this problem is solved by offering it to the community in a ceremonial setting. Cattle sacrifices happen in community feasts that occur about once a week. Because the portions are distributed according to age and sex using a rigid formula, meat can be shared without quarreling over the supply (Schneider, 1973). Furthermore, the religious taboo common in these societies in which a person who eats ritually slaughtered meat may not take milk on the same day has the effect of making milk more available to those who have no meat.

Magic

Magic is an attempt to mechanistically control supernatural forces.

When people do magic, they believe that their words and actions compel the spirit world to behave in certain ways. When magic fails to achieve its desired result, people believe that it has been done incorrectly. Failure thus is the result of improper performance of the ritual rather than the refusal of spirits to act.

Two of the most common magical practices are imitation and contagion. In **imitative magic**, the procedure performed resembles the result desired. A voodoo doll is a form of imitative magic with which many people are familiar. The principle is that mistreatment of a doll-like image of a person will cause injury to that person. The Christian practice of infant baptism can also be seen as a form of imitative magic. Most Christians believe that the holy water used in baptism washes away original sin, which is often ritually compared with dirt or a stain. Christians generally do not see themselves as compelling God in the baptism ritual, but they do believe that God will not fail to remove original sin from the child if a duly constituted authority does the ceremony properly.

With **contagious magic**, the idea is that an object that has been in contact with a person retains a magical connection with that person. For example, a person might attempt to increase the effectiveness of a voodoo doll by attaching to it a piece of clothing, hair, or other object belonging to the person they wish to injure. People in the United States often attribute special power and meaning to objects that have come in contact with famous or notorious people. Signed baseballs, bits of costumes worn by movie stars, and pens used to sign famous documents all become collector’s items and are imbued with special power and importance. For many Christians, relics, such as the bones of saints and objects that have come into contact with them, are considered to have special powers.

In many cultures, magical practices accompany most human activities. Among the people who live along the upper Asaro River in Papua New Guinea, when a child is born, its umbilical cord is buried so that a sorcerer cannot later use it to cause harm. To prevent an infant’s crying at night, a bundle of sweet-smelling grass is placed on the mother’s head and her wish for uninterrupted sleep is blown into the grass. The grass is then crushed over the head of the child who, in breathing its aroma, also breathes in the mother’s command not to cry. When a young boy kills his first animal, his hand is magically “locked” into the position of the successful kill. When he later tries to court a girl, he will use love magic, which in a particularly powerful form will make him appear in front of her wearing the face of another man she is known to be attracted to. Both magical and technical skills are used to make gardens and pigs grow. One technique is to blow smoke into the ear of a wild pig to tame it. This is based on the belief that the smoke cools and dries the pig’s “hot” disposition. Magical techniques are also used to treat serious illnesses, such as blowing smoke over a patient to cool a fever (which is hot) or administering sweet-smelling leaves with a command for the illness to depart (P. Newman, 1977, p. 413).

Divination

Divination, a ritual practice directed toward obtaining useful information from a supernatural authority, is found in many societies. Divination is performed to discover the unknown or the hidden. It may be used to predict the future, diagnose disease, find hidden objects, or discover something about the past. In many cultures, divination is used to discover who committed a crime.

The Naskapi, who hunt caribou on the Labrador Peninsula, use a form of divination called scapulomancy. In this divination ritual, a shoulder blade (scapula) of a caribou or other animal is scorched by fire. The scorched bone is used as a map of the hunting area, and the cracks in the bone are read as giving information about the best place to hunt (O. Moore, 1969). This technique was also used in ancient China and Japan (de Waal Malefijt, 1968, p. 220).

Most Americans are familiar with a wide variety of divination techniques. Tarot cards, palmistry, flipping coins, and reading auras are all forms of divination. Some farmers use a divination technique called water witching or dowsing to find sources of well water. In one technique, the dowser holds a forked willow branch (willow trees are often found by rivers and are therefore “sympathetic” to water) in their hands as they walk over a property. When they stand above water, the wand is supposed to bend downward. Although dousing has a wide following in the United States, when subject to scientific testing, dousing does no better than chance (Vogt & Hyman, 2000, p. xvii).

The practice of divination makes people more confident in their choices when they do not have all the information they need or when several alternative courses of action appear equal. Divination may also be practiced when a group decision must be made and there is disagreement. If the choice is made by divination, no member of the group feels rejected.

Prayer, sacrifice, and magic can be found in most religious traditions, and the distinctions between them are more a matter of degree than of exclusive classification. For example, a great many prayers contain elements of sacrifice, and most magical practitioners agree that, in theory, it is possible that the spirit world will not honor their request, although they argue that it does not happen in practice.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Religion and Vaccine Refusal

In late September 2018, measles cases began appearing among children in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in New York City. By the time the city declared the outbreak over, more than 600 cases had been confirmed. Measles spread to other Orthodox communities in New Jersey and in Michigan, causing well over 300 additional cases (Howard, 2019). The 2018–2019 outbreak wasn’t the only time religion and measles have gone together. In 2014, there were almost 400 cases in an Amish community in Ohio (Gastañaduy et al., 2016). A review published in 2013 identified more than 60 reports of measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases that occurred in religious communities (Grabenstein, 2012).

Measles can be a devastating disease. The World Health Organization (2019) reported that in 2018, 140,000 people died of it, mostly children under 5. Complications of measles are common and can kill years after the victim has seemingly recovered (Fox, 2016). The normal regime of two doses of the measles vaccine is about 97% effective in preventing the disease. Vaccines are most effective when everyone has had them. Then, community immunity makes the transmission of disease extremely rare. Even when the disease is introduced into such a population, it is extremely unlikely to spread to the small percentage of people for whom the vaccine is not effective.

Any medical procedure, including vaccines, has some risk. But the dangers of vaccines are very small, especially compared with the risks of the diseases they prevent. And some of the most highly publicized dangers, including the alleged connection of vaccines with autism, are simply fraud (Rao & Andrade, 2011).

So why, then, do many religions reject vaccines? The brief answer is that, with a few exceptions, *they don’t!* Statements from religious leaders supporting vaccination are common. A survey of religions showed overwhelming support for vaccination and showed that even when religious people do reject vaccinations, they do so because they have fears about vaccine safety rather than because such rejections are laid out in doctrine. The most serious measles outbreak in 2018–2019 affected ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. However, not only does Judaism not oppose vaccination but ultra-Orthodox communities have, in the past, volunteered for important vaccine trials (Grabenstein, 2012).

Christian Science (a religious denomination founded in the 19th century) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA, a religious denomination with roots in 16th-century Europe) do both tend toward rejection of vaccination. And both Christian Science and RCA communities have been subject to measles outbreaks (see Novotny et al., 1988; Van Buynder, 2014, p. 1). However, these are both very small religions, and well under one tenth of 1% of the U.S. population is a member of either. So, their doctrines cannot explain the national vaccine refusal rate of 3.3% documented by BlueCross BlueShield (2018).

Although some religious officials might preach vaccine refusal, the key determinant of whether people refuse to follow the medically prescribed vaccine program is the beliefs and actions of the members of their social networks. Anthropologist Emily Brunson (2013) analyzed vaccine nonconformity in Washington State. She found overwhelming evidence for the relationship between social networks and vaccine nonconformity. When 75% or more of a parent's social network recommended vaccinating children following medical recommendations, the parent was almost certain to follow those recommendations. However, as the percentage of social connections recommending vaccine nonconformity rose, so too did the odds that the parent would not follow medical recommendations. Critical changes began above 25%. And if more than half of a parent's social network advised against vaccinations, it was all but certain that something besides complete, on-time vaccination would be chosen.

Brunson's work helps us to understand both the presence of vaccine refusal in religious communities and why those who refuse for religious reasons represent only a small percentage of the total U.S. vaccine refusers. Religious communities usually have strong social networks. When the idea of nonconformity becomes implanted in such a network, it is more likely that community members will fail to vaccinate their children, and outbreaks of diseases like measles may occur among them. On the other hand, only a small percentage of strong social networks are religious communities, so most vaccine nonconformity happens outside of religious groups.

Brunson's work also has important implications for public health officials trying to increase the number of vaccinated children. Since parents depend so extensively on the members of their social networks in making vaccination decisions, education programs aimed solely at pregnant women are unlikely to be very effective. To work, such programs need to be aimed far more broadly. Targeting relatives and friends of mothers- and fathers-to-be is as important as, or maybe even more important than, targeting the parents themselves.

RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS

Every society has people who are considered to have a special relationship with the religious world. These religious practitioners are charged with organizing and leading major ritual events. There are many kinds of religious practitioners, but anthropologists generally organize them into two broad categories: shamans and priests.

Shamans

Shamans are part-time practitioners. In many respects, shamans are average members of their communities; they must hunt, gather, garden, or get up and go to work like anyone else. Their shamanic activities are reserved for specific ceremonies, times of illness, or crises.

Although learning to be a shaman may involve arduous training, study alone is never sufficient. To be a shaman, one must have direct personal experiences of the supernatural that other members of the community accept as authentic. Shamans believe they are chosen by the spirit world and can enter it. They use prayer, meditation, song, dance, pain, drugs, or any combination of techniques to achieve trance states in which they understand themselves (and are understood by their followers) as transported to the supernatural world. They may use such contact to bring guidance to themselves or their groups, heal sick people, or divine the future. Almost all societies have people who claim to contact the supernatural directly, but in foraging and tribal societies, shamans are likely to be the only religious practitioners.

Vision Quest

In some cultures, most adults may be expected to achieve direct contact with the supernatural. The **vision quest**, common among many Native American groups, is an example of this. In these cultures, a person is expected to develop a special relationship with an individual spirit that gives the person power and knowledge. The spirit acts as a personal protector or guardian. People seeking visions have very strong expectations of success and use fasting, isolation in a lonely spot, and sometimes self-mutilation to move themselves to an ecstatic religious state in which such a vision is possible.

For example, among the Thompson River Salish Indians of western Canada, historically, a boy would begin to search for guardian spirits between the ages of 12 and 16. He would prepare himself with ordeals such as running until exhausted and diving into ice-cold water. He would paint his face and wear special clothing. The nights before the quest were spent dancing, singing, and praying around a fire on a nearby mountain peak.

The boy then went on lonely pilgrimages into the mountains, eating nothing for days on end. He intensified his physical suffering by whipping his body with nettles and taking sweat baths. This strenuous regimen continued until the boy had a religious experience. In an ecstatic state, he would experience meeting with his guardian spirit, usually an animal or bird, and receiving instruction from it. The guardian spirit would teach the boy a spirit song by which the spirit could be called and how to prepare a medicine bundle of powerful magical objects (Pettitt, 1972).

Although the vision quest is an intensely individual experience, it is shaped by culture (Figure 13.8). Among the Crow Indians, for example, several informants related the same vision and interpretation to the anthropologist Robert Lowie (1963/1954). They told Lowie that they saw a spirit or several spirits riding along and that the rocks and trees around the riders turned into enemies who attacked them but were unable to do any harm. They interpreted this to mean that the spirits were making them invulnerable. This motif is common in Crow religious narratives, and the vision seekers worked it unconsciously into their experience. In another example of cultural influence, most Crow Indians obtained their spiritual blessing on the fourth night of their seclusion, and four is considered a mystical number among the Crow, while not necessarily significant for other native American groups.

Figure 13.8 A vision quest is an intensely individual experience of meeting with a guardian spirit. Here, Mike Anderson, an artist from the Ojibwe Nation, holds his sculpture, *Vision Quest*, which depicts an eagle and a dancing human figure.

Ron Bull / Contributor via Getty Images

Shamanic Curing

Before the advent of modern technological medicine, illness was usually treated by means that we would today consider spiritual. Shamans frequently played important roles in curing people. Illnesses were often thought to be caused by broken taboos, sorcery, witchcraft, or actions that made the ill person fall out of spiritual balance. In shamanic curing, the shaman, usually in a trance, travels into the supernatural world to discover the source of illness and what might be done to cure it. The following description of a Netsilik Inuit curing performance shows the shaman battling evil spirits:

> The shaman, adorned with his paraphernalia, crouched in a corner of the igloo … and covered himself with a caribou skin. The lamps were extinguished. A protective spirit called by the shaman entered his body and, through his mouth, started to speak very rapidly.… While the shaman was in trance, the *tupiliq* [an evil spirit believed to be round in shape and filled with blood] left the patient’s body and hid outside the igloo. The shaman then dispatched his protective spirits after the *tupiliqs*; they … drove the *tupiliqs* back into the igloo through the entrance; the audience encouraged the evil spirits, shouting: “Come in, come in, somebody is here waiting for you.” No sooner had the *tupiliqs* entered the igloo than the shaman, with his snow knife, attacked them and killed as many as he could; his successful fight was evidenced by the evil spirits’ blood on

> his hands. (Balikci, 1970, pp. 226–227)

If the patient died, it was said that the *tupiliqs* were too numerous for the shaman to kill or that evil spirits again attacked the patient after the performance.

In the modern world, shamanic curing often exists alongside modern technological medicine. People go to shamans for healing when they have diseases that technological medicine does not recognize, they lack money to pay for modern medical treatment, or they have tried modern treatment and it has failed. For example, in South Africa, traditional healers, called *Sangomas*, are much more common than medical doctors and provide effective diagnosis and treatment for many diseases, including respiratory problems, gastrointestinal problems, and other conditions (Figure 13.9). The government has tried to enlist them in its fight against HIV/AIDS (Cook, 2009) as well as to standardize and regulate the practice of traditional medicine (Street & Rautenbach, 2016).

Figure 13.9 A woman training to be a *Sangoma*, a traditional South African shamanic healer, falls into a trance during her initiation ceremony.

Patrick Durand / Contributor via Getty Images

Shamanistic curing does have important therapeutic effects. First, shamans generally do treat their patients with drugs. All cultures have a pharmacopeia, or collection of preparations used as medication. Scientific testing has shown that some (though not all) traditional medicines are effective (Fábrega, 1997, p. 144). Second, shamanic curing ritual uses story, symbolism, and dramatic action to bring together cultural beliefs and religious practices in a way that enables patients to understand the source of their illness. In other words, such rituals present a coherent model of sickness and health, explaining how the patient got ill and how they may become well again. These models can exert a powerful curative force (Roberts et al., 1993; Kaptchuk & Miller, 2015). Curing rituals express and reinforce the values of a culture and the solidarity of a society. They often involve participation by members of the audience, who are under a social expectation that they will be moved by the event and who may experience various degrees of ecstasy themselves. Shamanic curing ceremonies work by cultivating an awareness that “one’s body is located at a central intersection within a system of relations. Illness ruptures this pattern and healing restores the perception of harmony” (Glucklich, 1997, p. 95). The ceremonies are cathartic in the sense that they release the anxiety caused by various disturbing events. The natural and supernatural forces that have the power to do evil in a society are brought under control, and seemingly inexplicable misfortunes are given meaning within the cultural pattern.

Priests

In most state societies, religion is bureaucratized; that is, it is an established institution consisting of a series of ranked offices that exist independently of the people who fill them. Anthropologists use the term **priest** to refer to a person who is formally elected, appointed, or hired to a full-time religious office. Priests are responsible for performing certain rituals on behalf of individuals, groups, or the entire community.

Priests are most often associated with gods who are believed to have great power. They may be members of a religion that worships several high gods, as in the religions of the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans, or only one high god, as in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. Where priests exist, there is a division between the lay and priestly roles. Laypeople participate in rituals largely as passive respondents or audience members rather than as managers or performers.

People generally become priests through training and apprenticeship. For example, to become a cleric in any mainstream American religion, you enter the training program (often a seminary) of the appropriate religion. If you are successful, you are then certified by the training program and are then authorized to act as an official of the religion. However, priestly authority derives from certification by the religious institution the priest represents, and this may sometimes be given with little or no training. Religious offices may be the result of family and political connections rather than piety or study. For example, Giovanni de Medici (1475–1521), who became Pope Leo X in 1513, was made abbot (head religious officer) of a monastery at the age of 8. He was, not coincidentally, the second son of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492), ruler of the Florentine Republic.

In most mainstream religions in the United States, it is not considered essential for priests to have ecstatic religious experiences. However, this is not the case in all priestly religions. Although a priest’s authority ultimately derives from certification, such status may give a person the right to seek direct contact with gods and spirits. For example, in ancient Maya states, priests were members of a ranked bureaucracy. In many cases, they were also political leaders and, as such, exercised both priestly and political authority. Their religious and political positions gave them the right to use ecstatic techniques to travel in the spiritual world. At the dedication of buildings consecrated to the royal lineage, priests, as well as the king and other nobles, took hallucinogenic drugs and let blood by perforating their penises and other body parts with special lancets or ropes studded with obsidian blades (Figure 13.10). This created ecstatic states in which they would travel to the supernatural underworld to inform their ancestors of the new building and invite the souls of these former rulers to inhabit it. A Mayan ritual might have looked like this:

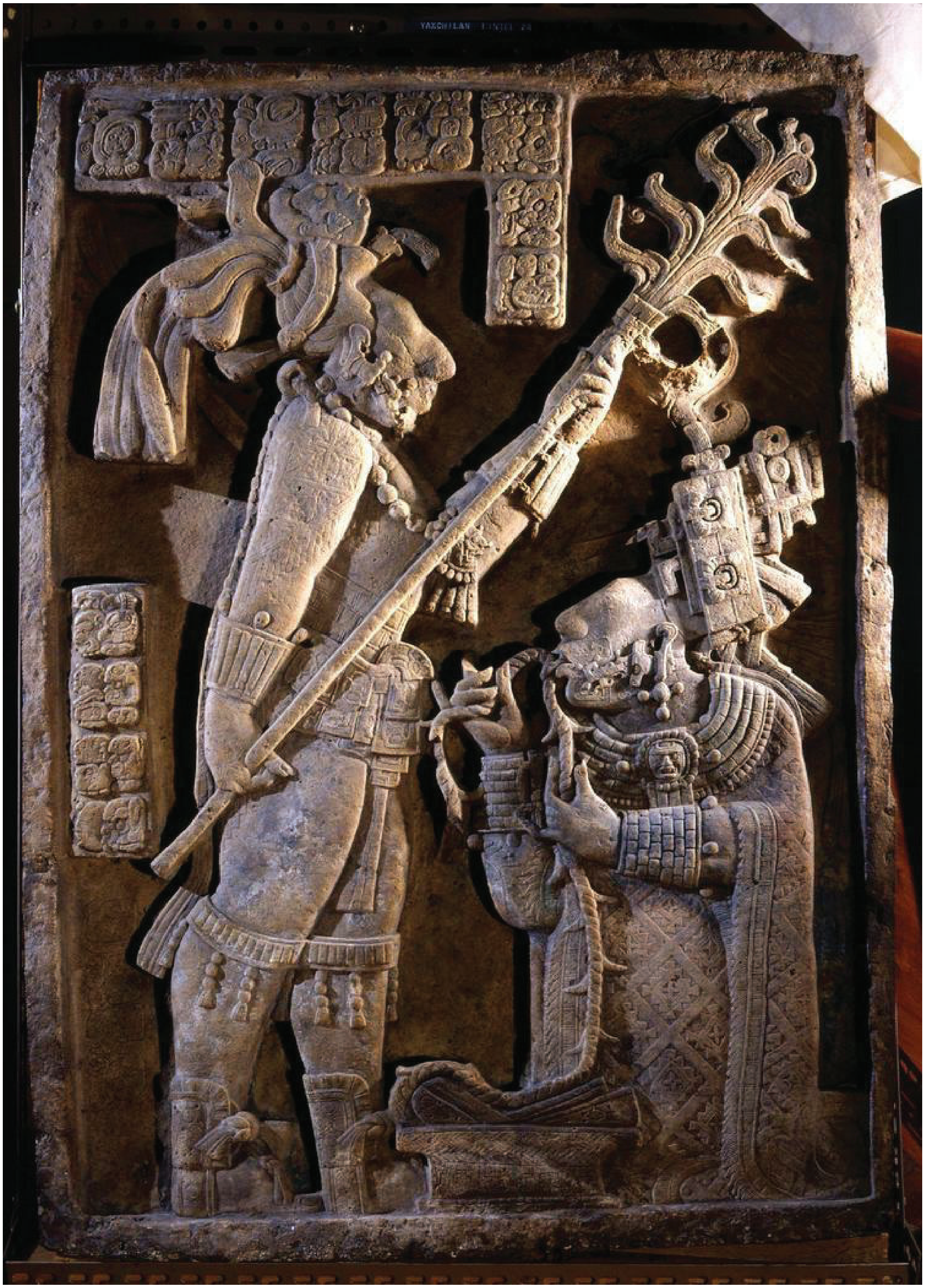
YAXCHILAN LINTEL 24

Figure 13.10 Maya rulers sought ecstatic states through

violent rituals. Here, in Lintel 24 from Structure 23 at Yaxchilan, a Maya site in Chiapas, Mexico, the ruler Shield Jaguar (left) holds a flaming torch above his wife, Lady Xoc (right), as she lets blood by drawing a studded rope through her tongue.

Werner Forman / Contributor via Getty Images

> Against a backdrop of terraced architecture, elaborately costumed dancers, musicians, warriors, and nobles entered the courts in long processions.… A crowd of participants wearing bloodletting paper or cloth tied in triple knots sat on platforms and terraces around the plaza.… Well into the ceremony, the ruler and his wife would emerge from within a building high above the court, and in full public view, he would lacerate his penis, she her tongue. Ropes drawn through their wounds carried the flowing blood to paper strips. The saturated paper … [was] placed in large plates, then carried to braziers and burned, creating columns of black smoke. The participants, already dazed through deprivation, public hysteria, and massive blood loss, were culturally conditioned to expect a hallucinatory experience. (Schele & Miller, 1986, p. 178)

As among the Maya, priests in state societies may pursue ecstatic religious experiences. However, states generally attempt to suppress independent shamans or bring them under bureaucratic control. Shamans claim the ability to directly contact the supernatural without certification by any institutionalized religion, and this challenges the authority of church and state.

Witches and Sorcerers

Although not universal, belief in the existence of witches and sorcerers is a common element of many of the world’s cultures. In some societies, **witchcraft** is understood as a physical aspect of a person. People are witches because their bodies contain a magical witchcraft substance. They generally acquire this substance through inheritance and may not even be conscious that they possess it. If a person’s body contains the witchcraft substance, their malevolent thoughts will cause ill to befall those around them. For example, the Azande, an East African group, believe that witches’ bodies contain a substance called *mangu*, which makes them cause misfortune and death to others (Evans-Pritchard, 1958/1937). This sort of witchcraft is always understood as causing evil to others. Thoughts such as jealousy, envy, and rage cause disease and ill fortune. A witch’s positive thoughts do not help others. People are suspected of having the witchcraft substance when evil befalls those around them, particularly family members. Such witches are generally believed to be unable to prevent themselves from causing evil.

The conscious manipulation of words and ritual objects with the intent of magically causing either harm or good is **sorcery**. Bone pointing, a magical technique of sorcerers in Melanesia, is an example of the use of sorcery to cause illness. The sorcerer first makes a magical arrow of a pointed object. Then he catches sight of his victim and viciously stabs the air as if to wound his victim and twist the point in the wound. Malinowski (1984/1922, p. 75) reported that “this, if carried out properly and not counteracted by a still more powerful magician, will never fail to kill a man.”

Anthropologists in many parts of the world have observed cases of death from sorcery. In a study of such reports, Walter Cannon (1942) argued that an individual who was psychologically vulnerable to begin with and aware that they were being attacked by sorcery would exhibit an extreme stress reaction that would have profound physiological effects. Such an individual might despair, lose their appetite, and slowly starve to death, unable to overcome the inertia caused by the belief that they are a victim. Persistent terror and the weakening effects of hunger may make the victim vulnerable to infectious agents as well as stroke and heart attack. Much work in biomedicine in the past 60 years confirms Cannon’s ideas and details the specific biochemical pathways through which such reactions may occur (Sternberg, 2002; Barber, 2012).

Accusations of Witchcraft or Sorcery

Although people do actually practice witchcraft and sorcery, their main effects on society are achieved through accusations. Accusing friends and neighbors of witchcraft or sorcery is common in many cultures and serves various purposes.

The most frequent form of witchcraft accusation serves to stigmatize differences. People who do not fit into conventional social categories are often suspected of witchcraft. The European and American image of the witch as an evil old hag dressed in black is a good example. Until relatively recently, social norms in western European society dictated that women should have husbands and children (or, alternatively, they might become nuns). Impoverished women who remained in the community yet were unmarried or widowed without children violated this social convention and might be subject to witchcraft accusations. Thus, the image of the witch—elderly, dressed in black, living alone—is the image of the impoverished European widow (Brain, 1989; Horsley, 1979). Those accused of witchcraft because they fail to conform may be ostracized and harassed but are unlikely to be killed or driven out of the community. They are valuable as negative role models, examples of what not to be. The lesson that a young girl might derive from the witch is to get married and have children or you might end up a witch.

Witchcraft and sorcery accusations may also be used to scapegoat. In times of great social change, when war, disease, calamity, or technological change undermines the social order, people’s lives lose meaning. Under such circumstances, they may conclude that witches and sorcerers are responsible for their misfortunes and must be found and destroyed for their own lives to be improved.

Although we often think of witch hunting as belonging to the Middle

Ages, during that era, the social order remained stable and accusations of witchcraft were fairly rare. The witch craze belongs to the 1500s and 1600s, a time of great artistic and technological achievement but also a time of social disaster. Plague swept repeatedly through Europe, and the medieval social and religious order collapsed in war and chaos. In regions where governments and religious institutions remained strong, witchcraft accusations were relatively scarce. However, in areas where these institutions collapsed, accusations were frequent (Behringer, 2004). In the conditions of instability that resulted, people were willing to believe that witches were the cause of their misery and to pursue reprisals against those they suspected of witchcraft (Figure 13.11). The accused witch who was a social deviant might be scorned and ostracized, but witches who were believed to be responsible for widespread social disaster were more likely to be killed or banished. Current scholarship estimates that about 50,000 Europeans were murdered as witches, half of these within the borders of current-day Germany (Behringer, 2004, pp. 149–150).

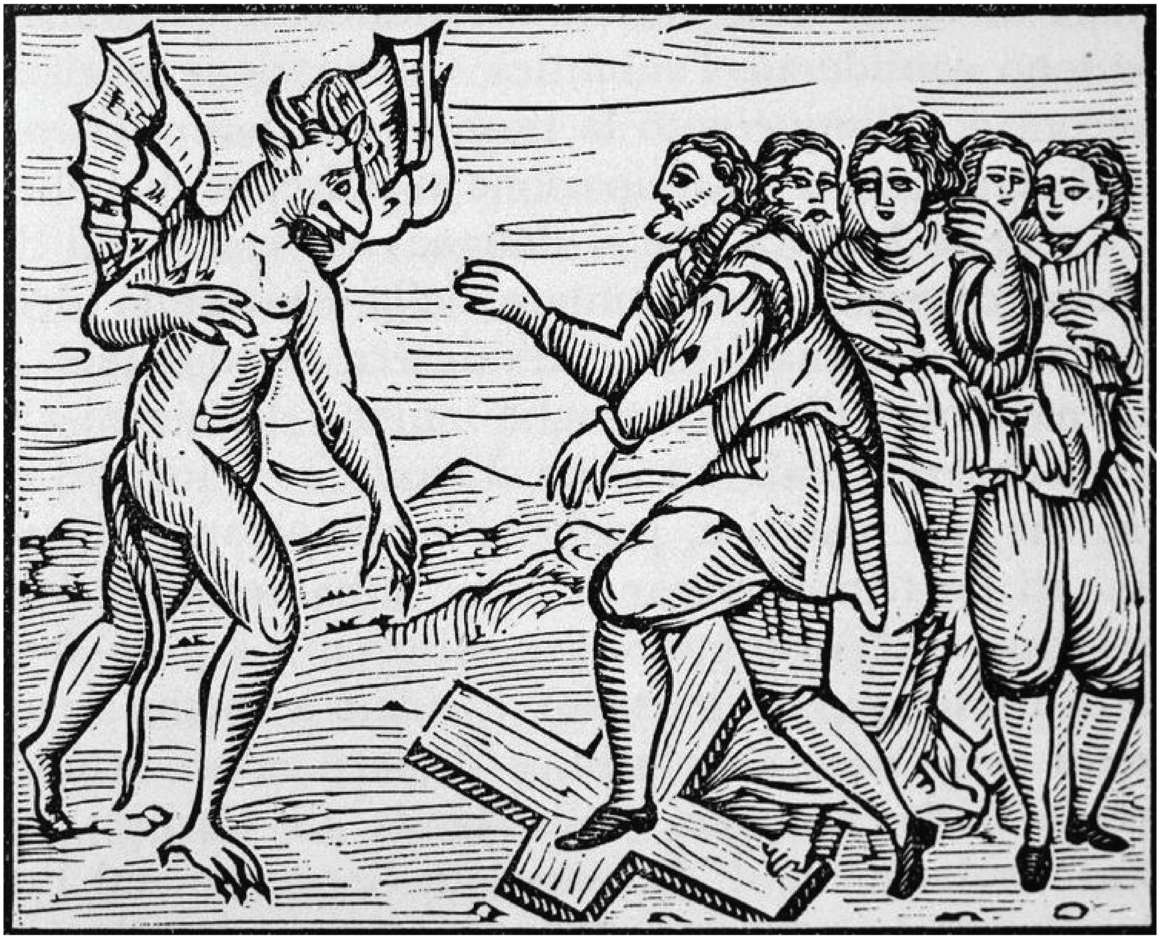

Figure 13.11 Witchcraft accusations were common in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, a time of social upheaval and disease. This illustration from the 1608 witch-hunting manual *Compendium Maleficarum* shows a devil ordering witches to defile the cross.

DE AGOSTINI PICTURE LIBRARY / Contributor via Getty Images

Modern Witches, Wiccans, and Neopagans

Recent times in Europe and the United States have seen the emergence of religious worshippers who call themselves witches, **Wiccans**, or **neopagans**. A basic principle of most Wiccan belief is the threefold law, which proclaims that whatever good or ill people do in the world returns to them three times, either in quantity or force.

Wiccans are no more likely to commit evil acts than are other members of society.

Many Wiccan beliefs are derived from the work of 19th- and 20th-century authors, particularly Gerald Gardner. Gardner claimed to have rediscovered the ancient beliefs of an aboriginal fairy race, and many Wiccans today say that they practice an ancient pre-Christian religion of nature worship. However, most scholars believe that Gardner composed his religion from a variety of modern sources (Hutton, 1999; Orion, 1995). This is not important to most Wiccans. For example, Diotima Mantineia, associate editor of the Witch's Voice website (www.witchvox.com), has said, "It doesn't matter to me how old Wicca is because when I connect with Deity as Lady and Lord I know I am connecting with something much larger and vaster than I can fully comprehend" (in Allen, 2001).

Surveys from the 1990s through the mid-2010s show increasing numbers of Wiccans and Pagans in the United States. A broad survey of U.S. religious life in 2014 placed the number of Wiccans and Pagans at between 1 and 1.5 million. The survey found that Wiccans and Pagans were overwhelmingly white (84%) and mostly female (64%). They tended to have about the same education as non-Wiccans but to be a little less well off financially (Marchetti, 2022; Singh-Kurtz & Kopf, 2018).

The data from the Pew survey showed that Wiccans and Pagans tended to have liberal positions on social issues but were more likely to identify as Independents than either Democrats or Republicans. Neopaganism in Europe is closely associated with nationalism and right-wing political causes. Paganism was associated with the rise of Nazi Germany in general and Heinrich Himmler, the head of Hitler's SS secret police, in particular (Kurlander, 2017). It remains connected with extreme right-wing politics in Ukraine (Ivakhiv, 2005), Germany, and Scandinavia (White, 2017; von Schnurbein, 2016). Most people in the United States who call themselves neopagans are not associated with the extreme political right. However, those who identify as Odinists often are (Carless, 2017).

RELIGION AND CHANGE

As we have seen, religion is generally a force that preserves the social order. This may be particularly evident in stratified societies where the elite invokes religious authority to control the poor. In such situations, religion acts as a way of maintaining social, economic, and political inequality. However, even when religion does not support oppression, it is usually a conservative force, promoting the idea that the way that society has historically been ordered is right and proper.

Most religions contain implicit or explicit visions of the ideal society—images of a correct, just social order. No society achieves this vision; people never live exactly the way they are supposed to. However, most of the time, religion validates society; the image of society as it should be is not so different from life in society as it is. As a result, people tend to feel that the society they live in is reasonably good (or the best available). If it hasn’t achieved the perfection their beliefs tell them to strive for, it is at least on the right path.

However, if societies change very rapidly (because of colonization, disease, or technological change) or if groups are systematically enslaved and oppressed, the vision of the ideal world painted by people’s religious beliefs may be very different from their daily experience. People may feel that they are lost, that their vision of the ideal cannot be attained, or that, in light of new developments, their beliefs need to be modified. Under these conditions, prophets may emerge and new religions created. Religious movements vary in the effectiveness with which they bring social and political change. Even those that fail in these respects may create powerful new identities among their members.

In the United States, rapid cultural and economic change, economic oppression, powerlessness, and anomie experienced by different social groups have frequently led to new religious movements, sometimes with dire results. The prophecies of People’s Temple leader Jim Jones or the Branch Davidian David Koresh provided new lives for their followers, giving them consistent and meaningful ways of understanding the world (even though others believed these ways were misguided). However, these prophecies also led to the deaths of Jones, Koresh, and most of their followers.

Religion can be a powerful force for social change, providing people with the rationale and motivation for political involvement and personal renewal. From ISIS and the Taliban to the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, LifeWay, and the 700 Club, religious leaders can have a powerful political impact. However, prophets may also give their followers convincing models of society that cannot exist in our material, social, and political world. When that happens, the results may be explosive.

Varieties of Religious Prophesy

To begin a new religion or create a substantial modification in an existing religion, prophets must have a code that consists of at least three elements: They must identify what is wrong with the world, present a vision of a better world to come, and describe a method of transition from the existing world to the better world. Religious movements can, to some degree, be characterized by the nature of their understanding of the world to come and their methods for achieving that world.

Many religious movements are either nativistic or vitalistic. A **nativistic** movement aims to restore what its followers believe was a golden age of the past. The nativistic message is that things were far better in the past and have degenerated because people have fallen away from traditional practices. The glorious past may be regained if rules and policies advocated by the prophet are followed. The Ghost Dance, described in the next section, is a good example of a nativistic prophecy.

A **vitalistic** prophecy looks to the future rather than the past. For vitalists, the past is seen as either evil or neutral. The golden age is in the future and can be achieved by following the teachings of the prophet. The Rastafarian religion described in the Reading

Assignment in this chapter is a good example.

Though it is not specifically religious, another example of vitalism with which most Americans are familiar is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. In that speech, King described a future where "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" and where children "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." King thus looked ahead to a then-unprecedented chapter in U.S. history.

Often, the poor and powerless in a society create religions that challenge those of the mainstream. Such religions may rationalize their lower social position and emphasize an afterlife in which their suffering will be rewarded. In some cases, these religions have a **messianic** outlook; they focus on the coming of a special individual who will usher in a utopian world. Other religions are **millenarian**; they look to a future cataclysm or disaster that will destroy the current world and establish in its wake a world characterized by their version of justice. In many messianic and millenarian religions, members participate in rituals that give individuals direct access to supernatural power. They experience states of ecstasy heightened by singing, dancing, handling dangerous creatures such as snakes, or using drugs.

The holiness churches common in Appalachia among coal miners and other rural poor who lead difficult and dangerous lives are a good example of a religion that has emerged in response to poverty and hardship. In church services, loud music, singing, and dancing cause some members to experience "being filled with the Holy Spirit." In this ecstatic state, they handle poisonous snakes, frequently throwing them at each other (Figure 13.12). Snake handlers are frequently bit and sometimes die. However, for members, snake handling proves that "Jesus has the power to deliver them from death here and now" (Daugherty, 1993, p. 344). For holiness congregation members, practices such as snake handling, faith healing, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) are daily demonstrations of their ability to gain access to God's power. The fact that social elites are rarely members of such groups is proof that holiness members have access to forms of power that social elites lack (T. Burton, 1993; Covington, 1995).

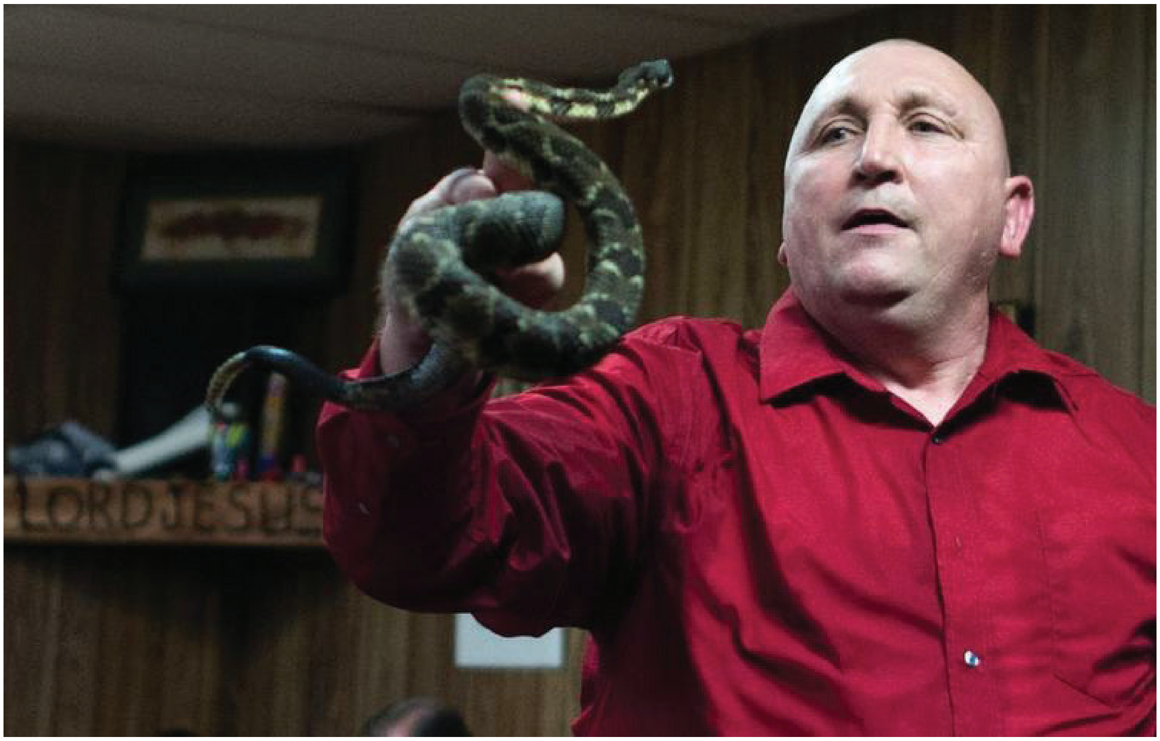

Figure 13.12 In states of religious ecstasy, members of holiness churches in Appalachia handle poisonous snakes. They believe this demonstrates God's power and, for them, serves as proof of their access to forms of power that social elites lack. In this picture, Pastor Chris Wolford holds a timber rattlesnake during a service at a church in West Virginia in 2018.

ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS / Contributor via Getty Images

In **syncretism**, people merge two or more religious traditions, hiding the beliefs, symbols, and practices of one behind similar attributes of the other. Religious syncretism is often found among deeply oppressed people. Santeria, an African-based religion originating in Cuba, is a good example (J. Murphy, 1989). Santeria emerged from slave society. Europeans attempted to suppress African religions, but the enslaved resisted by combining African religion, Catholicism, and French spiritualism to create a new religion (Lefever, 1996). They identified African deities, called *orichas*, with Catholic saints and used them for purposes such as curing, casting spells, and influencing other aspects of worshippers' lives. In this way, they could appear to practice Catholicism to their masters as they continued to practice their own religions as well. Each oricha/saint has distinct attributes and is believed to control a specific aspect of human life. For example, Orunmila, identified with Saint Francis of Assisi, is believed to know each person's destiny and can therefore give guidance about how to improve one's fate. Santeria has spread through the Spanish Caribbean, Brazil, and North America, taking different forms in different locations.

The Ghost Dance and Religious Change in Native North America

The history of native North America provides a particularly good example of religious innovation. The European and (involuntary) African invasion brought disaster to Native American societies. Disease, warfare, and technological change undermined native lifeways and belief systems. In this context, a series of prophets and religious movements emerged, including the prophetic movements of Handsome Lake (1735–1815), Neolin (the Delaware Prophet, active 1760s), Tenskwatawa (the Shawnee Prophet 1775–1836), and the **Ghost Dance movement**.

The visions of the Ghost Dance prophets of the second half of the 19th century were directly related to the expansion of Euro-American power. In the late 1860s, Wodziwob (died c. 1872), a Northern Paiute Indian living in the Sierra Nevada, became the first Ghost Dance prophet. Wovoka (1856–1932), the second Ghost Dance prophet, was the son of an early follower of Wodziwob and had probably seen the Ghost Dance and heard its prophecies as a boy. Both prophets foresaw that the ancestors would return on an immense train.

Following this event, a cataclysm would swallow up all the whites but leave their goods behind for the Native Americans that followed the Wodziwob and Wovoka. Heaven on earth would ensue, and the Great Spirit would return to live with the people (de Waal Malefijt, 1968, p. 344; Mooney, 1973/1896, p. 771).

Wodziwob and Wovoka taught that the arrival of paradise could be hastened by specific rituals, including a series of dances, songs, and, in the case of Wovoka, the wearing of special clothing painted with designs he saw in his visions. Some of Wovoka’s followers believed that these shirts had the power to protect them from bullets. Although Wovoka called for peace with the whites, he also taught that the whites would either be carried away by high winds or become Indians (Lesser, 1933), and he urged Indians to live as they had before the whites arrived.

The Ghost Dance prophecy was welcomed by many Native Americans, who sent representatives to speak with Wovoka and learn its rituals. The tribes understood the Ghost Dance vision in diverse ways, but it received its most radical interpretation among the Lakota, for whom the conditions of conquest and reservation life were particularly oppressive. Although the Lakota had been among those that defeated Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, they were eventually forced into submission. Starved and expected to survive by agriculture on nonproductive lands, they found a vision that promised the disappearance of their oppressors and the return of earlier times extremely appealing.

As the Ghost Dance spread among the Lakota during the fall of 1890, government agents became frightened by the popularity of the dance and the Lakota belief that the whites would shortly disappear. They ordered the Sioux to stop the dance, and some but not all Lakota obeyed. The government tried to suppress the remaining dancers, but they fled into the badlands to perform Ghost Dance ceremonies and await the cataclysm that would sweep the oppressors from the plains. A complex series of moves followed as the government tried to force an end to the Ghost Dance.

The final act of the drama occurred on December 28 and 29, 1890, when the Seventh Cavalry, the same unit that had been destroyed at Little Bighorn, captured the last remaining band of Ghost Dancers. In the battle that ensued at Wounded Knee, about 350 Lakota Ghost dancers, including many women and children, were killed, and the notion that doing Ghost Dance rituals would hasten the disappearance of the whites or protect Native Americans from them lost credibility (Figure 13.13).

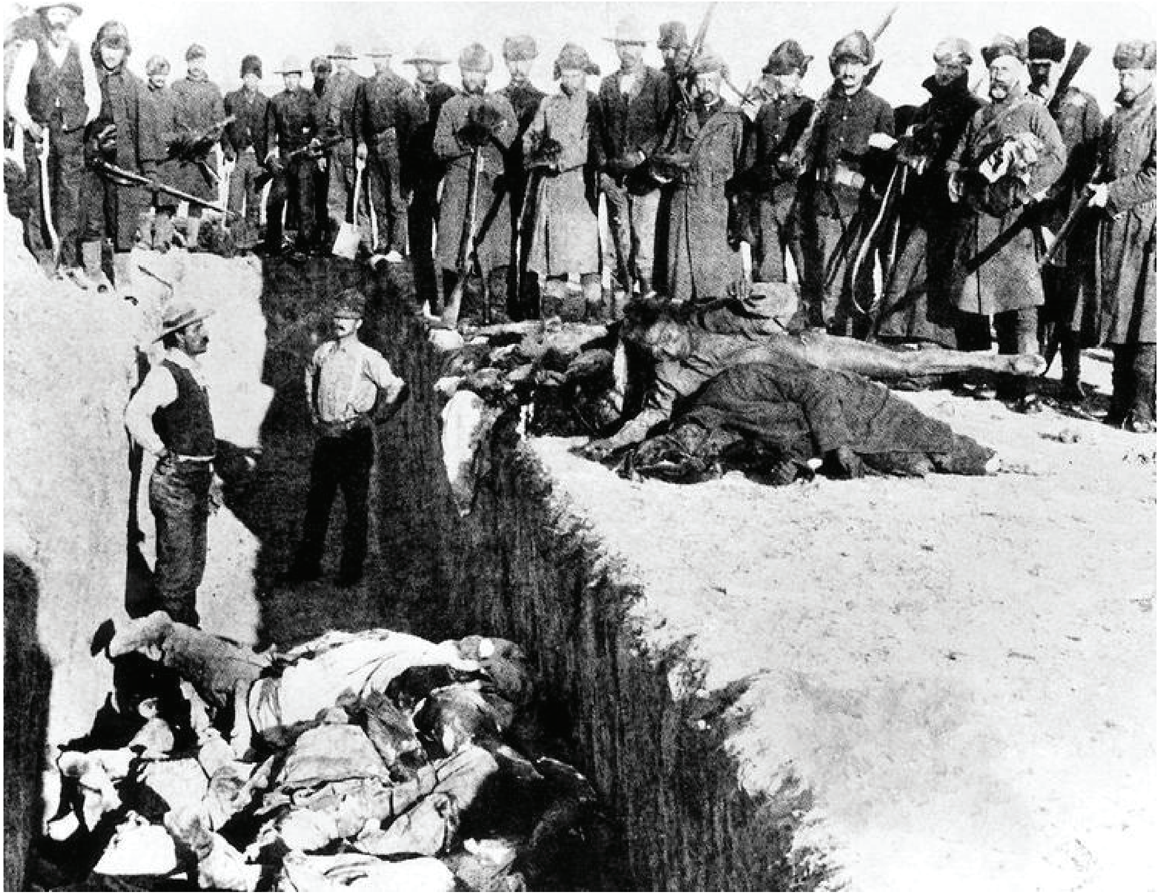

Figure 13.13 In December 1890, at the battle of Wounded Knee, members of the Seventh Cavalry, killed about 350 Lakota Ghost dancers. In January 1891, the bodies of those killed were buried in a mass grave.

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The Ghost Dance religion did not end with the battle at Wounded Knee, however. Especially in Oklahoma, people continued to do the Ghost Dance into the 1930s, and one group of adherents continued to practice until the 1960s (Kehoe, 1989). But after Wounded Knee, the Ghost Dance declined, and by the first years of the 20th century, few people practiced it.

However, another religion appeared at about the same time as the Ghost Dance prospered and has become a major force in Native American communities. The Native American Church, sometimes known as the peyote religion, now has approximately 300,000 members in the United States and Canada (Brown, 2016; "Field Full of Buttons," 1999).

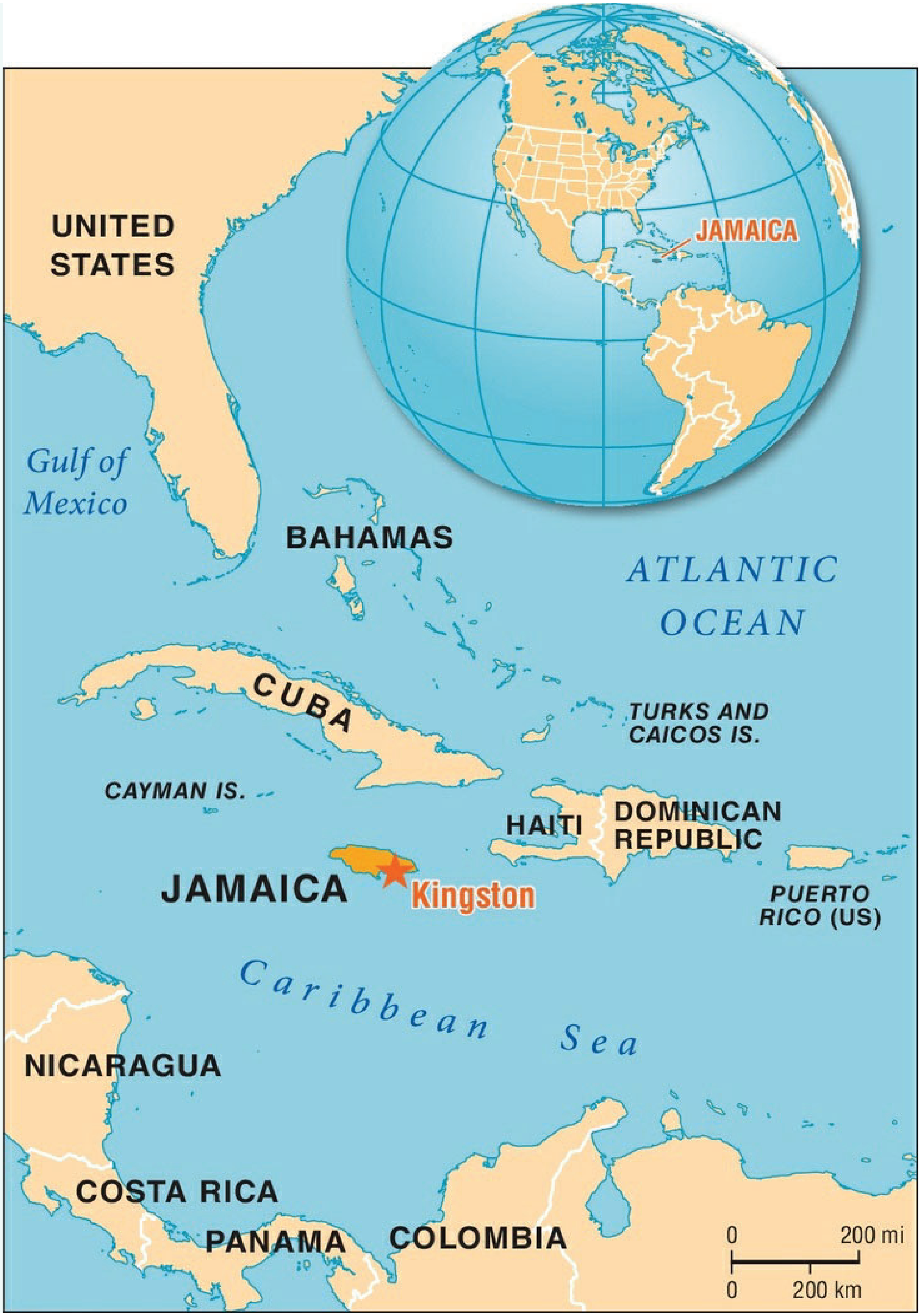
Peyote, a small, hallucinogenic cactus, grows only in southern Texas and northern Mexico. Although indigenous peoples in Mexico and southern Texas have long used peyote in religious rituals, it did not spread to other areas until the late 19th century. The spread of the modern peyote ceremony was due largely to the efforts of Comanche, Kiowa, and Caddo leaders, including Quanah Parker (1845–1911), Ahpeahtone ("Wooden Lance," 1856–1931), and John Wilson ("Moon Head," 1845–1901). Some of them had visited Wovoka, the Ghost Dance prophet, but all had rejected his teachings (Stewart, 1987, p. 80). Peyote leaders (called roadmen) teach that God is accessible to Indians through the sacrament of peyote. In all-night meetings, members of the Native American Church chew peyote, pray and sing, and experience the presence of God. Quanah Parker said, "When an Indian Peyotist goes to [a peyote ceremonial meeting] he talks to God, and not about what man has written in the scriptures about what God said" (quoted in Brito, 1989, p. 14).

Although the use of a hallucinogen to achieve communion with the supernatural may seem an affront to mainstream American society, church leaders preached a vision they called the Peyote Road, the elements of which include abstinence from alcohol, attentiveness to family obligations, marital fidelity, self-support, helpfulness among members of the group, and attempting to live at peace with all peoples

(Brito, 1989; Stewart, 1987). These are all values that Americans of any ethnic origin are likely to support. The teachings of the Native American Church provide a pathway through which Native Americans can operate successfully in mainstream U.S. society. At the same time, the notion that communion with God is possible for Native Americans through the use of peyote and the rituals surrounding it separates them from other Americans and allows them to affirm their identity. Thus, the church has been successful because it simultaneously allows its members to reinforce their identity and adapt to the demands of the larger society.

Ethnography

The Rastafari: Vitalist Prophecy and Resistance to Domination


JAMAICA
UNITED STATES
Gulf of Mexico
BAHAMAS
ATLANTIC OCEAN
CUBA
TURKS AND CAICOS IS.
CAYMAN IS.
HAITI
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
JAMAICA
Kingston
PUERTO RICO (US)
Caribbean Sea
NICARAGUA
COSTA RICA
PANAMA
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Description

Map 13.1 Jamaica and its capital, Kingston.

The Rastafari religion began in Jamaica in the 1930s, a time when much of the Jamaican peasantry was being incorporated into the emerging capitalist economy as wage labor. Since that time, the Rastafari have spread throughout the Caribbean, into parts of Africa, and to the urban centers of the United States, Western Europe, and Canada. The Rastafari began as a new religion of resistance. However, with the international success of reggae music, since the 1970s, the Jamaican government has marketed the movement as a key part of the island’s cultural heritage (King & Foster, 2001). Due to the success of this marketing, Rastafarians are increasingly part of mainstream culture in Jamaica and elsewhere.

In the 19th century, after the end of slavery, Jamaica developed a peasant economy organized around a system of small-scale exchanges involving networks of extended kin. But by the 1920s, capitalism, primarily in the form of the American-owned United Fruit Company, had undermined this economy. Some Jamaicans benefited, but there was substantial racial stratification. Whites and biracial people accumulated wealth at the expense of Black peasants. As Jamaica became increasingly tied to the international economy, the pool of impoverished and landless unemployed grew. By the mid-1930s, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and many had moved to urban areas, particularly Kingston. Rastafarianism emerged among these people.

In 1930, Ras (Duke) Tafari (1892–1975) was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia in an elaborate coronation ceremony. During the ceremony, Tafari was proclaimed “King of Kings” and “Lion of Judah.” A retinue of European dignitaries paid homage to him. The event drew enormous publicity in many colonized places in Africa and the Caribbean. Shortly after, Leonard Howell, a former cook in the U.S. Army, had a prophetic revelation (R. Lewis, 1998). Born in Jamaica in 1898, Howell lived in the United States from 1918 to 1932. He was probably influenced by Trinidadian Black nationalist George Padmore (Chevannes, 1994). On his return to Jamaica in 1932, Howell declared that the coronation of Haile Selassie fulfilled biblical prophecies: Haile Selassie was the messiah and the hope of freedom for all Black people. Howell proclaimed, “People, you are poor, but you are rich, because God planted mines of diamonds and gold for you in Africa, your homeland.… Our King has come to redeem you home to your motherland, Africa” (Lee, 2003, p. 70).

Although Howell is generally credited with being the first preacher of Rastafari, others had similar visions, including Robert Hinds, Joseph “Teacher” Hibbert, and Archibald Dunkley. The Rasta leaders founded communities in and around Kingston that emphasized what they understood as traditional African values. Haile Selassie became their central symbol, embodying the value of cooperative work efforts, respect for life, and the unity of all peoples of African descent. Through their belief that Haile Selassie is the messiah (a faith that his overthrow and assassination in 1974 did not diminish), the Rastas affirm Blackness and their African roots. Through him, they proclaim their rejection of the values of capitalist society and the competitive marketplace.

The idea of return to Africa is a central theme in Rasta thinking, and it has several meanings. It may mean a literal travel to Africa. Some Rastas did move to Ethiopia to settle on land given to them by Haile Salassie in 1948. Alternatively, return may be interpreted as a call to live what Rastafarians believe are African lifestyles wherever they find themselves.

Rejecting aspirations of social mobility and participation in wage labor, the Rastas instead form networks of cooperation (Figure

13.14). In Jamaica, they engage in fishing, handicrafts, and hustling in the cities. In the rural areas, they engage in family-based subsistence agriculture with minimal involvement in the market economy. The small group of Rastas living in Shashamane, Ethiopia, relies on their agricultural produce and financial donations from abroad. In urban England, Canada, and the United States, Rasta economic activities tend to be small-scale cooperative businesses such as restaurants, craft shops, small clothing stores, and the sale of marijuana. These enterprises are based on the productivity of extended family networks, and Rastafari circulate their wealth through the community in the form of gifts, loans, parties, and many other personalized relationships.

Figure 13.14 A rastafarian.

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Two other important symbols of Rastafarian culture are ganja (marijuana) and the use of a special vocabulary. The use of ganja has been common on Jamaican agricultural estates since the turn of the 20th century and is part of Jamaican working-class life. Although it was illegal, the upper classes approved it because it acted as a stimulant and an incentive to work. Rastafari, however, have reversed these meanings. To them, ganja became a tool of illumination to be used at “reasoning sessions,” where they gather to interpret biblical passages and share beliefs about freedom, slavery, colonialism, and racism. Ganja, they believe, allows them to see through the evils of the bourgeois world, understand the roots of their oppression, and verify the authenticity of the Rasta lifestyle. Thus, whereas the traditional use of ganja in Jamaica supported the dominant society, Rasta use subverts it. The Jamaican government decriminalized possession of up to two ounces of marijuana in 2015. The same law specifically allows Rastafarians to use it for religious purposes.

The sale of ganja, both legal and illegal, is part of the economy of many Rasta groups. As with other aspects of Rasta economy, the networks for growing, preparing, and distributing ganja are based on friendship, alliances, and reciprocity. Although the Rastas have encountered difficulties with law enforcement, ganja has provided them with a livelihood that allows them independence and freedom from the capitalist system, a position they value highly. Ultimately, many Rastafarians hope that their world will become more and more based on reciprocity and redistribution and that money as a medium of exchange will disappear from their community.

Rastafarian linguistic usages include the invention of I-centered words, phrases, and suffixes, such as *ital* for *vital*, and the replacement of such diminutive prefixes as *under-* and *sub-* by their opposites. For example, *understand* is rendered *overstand*. For Rastas, the use of I-centered words focuses attention on the radical equality of all people and their identity with God. As one said, “Who is you? There is no you. There is only I, I, and I. I is you, I is God, I is I.… We are all each other and one with God because it is the same life energy that flows within all of us” (in Homiak, 1998, p. 167).

From their founding until the 1970s, Rastas faced discrimination and resistance in Jamaica. This included confrontations between Rastas and the police in 1958, 1959, and 1960, as well as an attack on the Rasta community at Coral Gardens in 1963 that claimed eight lives and led to the arrest of more than 150 people. However, beginning in the 1970s, because of the popularity of reggae stars such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, and Burning Spear, the government began to promote reggae music and Rasta styles as part of Jamaica’s cultural heritage. It promoted reggae music festivals such as Reggae Sunsplash and its successor, Reggae Sumfest (https://www.reggaesumfest.com/). Government and music industry officials have even considered trying to control the reggae brand through the creation of an official “authentic reggae” designation (Associated Press, 2015).

In 2017, the Jamaican government officially apologized for the Coral Gardens attack and offered reparations in the form of a trust fund and land (Wilkinson, 2017). And in 2018, UNESCO designated reggae an “Intangible Cultural Heritage.” Many Rastafarians still consider their lifestyle as a form of resistance, but the increasing linkage between Rastafarians and the Jamaican government has led to their decline as a political and social force (King, 2002; King & Foster, 2001).

Critical Thinking Questions

1. The Rasta movement arose in Jamaica but has gained enormous popularity worldwide. What sorts of people are likely to be attracted to the Rasta message, and what elements of that message are likely to be particularly appealing to them?
2. Rastafarians are probably better known worldwide for their association with reggae music than with specific religious beliefs. Consider a reggae song by a major artist such as Bob Marley, Burning Spear, or Peter Tosh (do some research if you are not familiar with any of these artists). How do the lyrics reflect Rasta religious belief?
3. There are many new religions in the United States. Are any of them similar to the Rasta movement? If so, in what ways are they similar?

FUNDAMENTALISM AND RELIGIOUS

CHANGE

In the past two decades, there has been an increase in religious groups that can be described as fundamentalist. The term *fundamentalist* comes from the Christian religious tradition, particularly from *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, a series of books that appeared between 1910 and 1915. Publication of *The Fundamentals* was funded by Lyman and Milton Stewart, wealthy California oilmen who were disturbed by scholarly analysis of the Bible. The Stewards argued for literalism and against Catholicism, socialism, evolutionism, and many other religious, social, and scientific movements of the time.

Because of its origins in Christianity, the term *fundamentalism* is not easily applied to other religious traditions. However, scholar of Islam Malise Ruthven (2004) has argued that the term is still useful and that groups identified as fundamentalist have “family resemblances.”

Fundamentalists tend to see religion as the basis for both personal and communal history. Thus, fundamentalism is often connected with nationalism. Fundamentalists tend to believe that there is a single unified truth that they can possess and understand. They tend to envision themselves as fighting in a cosmic struggle of good against evil. In this battle, demonizing the opposition is a perfectly acceptable tactic. Fundamentalists tend to perceive themselves as a persecuted minority even when this is, objectively, not the case. They are selective about which parts of their tradition they emphasize and which parts of modernity they accept and reject. Fundamentalism is very frequently connected with the control of female sexuality (Almond et al., 1995; Juergensmeyer, 2003).

Islamic fundamentalism, often called Salafism or Islamism, is implicated in the rise of ISIS in 2014 as well as in terror attacks around the world. Between 1979 and 2019, the French think tank Fondapol recorded 33,769 Islamist attacks, resulting in 167,096 fatalities. The attacks occurred in 81 countries. Those with the largest number of attacks were Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Algeria, Syria, Yemen, and The Philippines. In the United States, between 1979 and 2019, 48 attacks claimed 3,114 lives (Reynié 2019). Islamists are far from having a monopoly on terror attacks, however. Between January 1, 2010, and December 31, 2017, there were at least 16 terror attacks in the United States linked to white supremacist movements, whose members often consider themselves Christian fundamentalists (Mathis-Lilley, 2017). Right-wing-inspired terror since then has included the deaths of 11 in an antisemitic attack on a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 11 dead in an attack on college students in Thousand Oaks, California; and 23 deaths in an attack on Mexican Americans in El Paso, Texas, and many others. Buddhism is deeply implicated in genocidal violence and terror against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (J. Freeman, 2017). And hundreds of attacks by Hindu fundamentalists against Indian religious minorities have been reported since 2014 (Safi, 2017). In 2021, the Evangelical Fellowship of India reported more than 500 incidents of violence against Indian Christians, including three murders (Evangelical Fellowship of India, 2021). Violence against Indian Muslims has become extremely common as well (Wahab, 2021).

Although members of fundamentalist groups sometimes see their religious beliefs as unchanging, the rise of fundamentalism is itself an important, and recent, religious change. Fundamentalist movements usually have specific original leaders and points of origin. As we saw, the American Christian fundamentalist movement began with the publication of *The Fundamentals*. Modern Islamic fundamentalism is associated with the work of Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966, born in the Egyptian village of Musha described in Chapter 5) and the Muslim Brotherhood. Hindu fundamentalist organizations date to the founding of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) political party in 1925. Its descendant, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has played a critical role in Indian politics since the 1990s, has held a majority in the Indian Parliament since 2014, and became the largest political party in the world in 2015 (“BJP Becomes,” 2015).

The rise of fundamentalism raises important questions for anthropologists. Two seem particularly critical. First, what forces have led to the rise of fundamentalisms in so many places? Second, is fundamentalism a problem, and, if so, what should be done about it? These questions cannot be answered easily or definitively, but we can propose some partial explanations.

To some degree, the pattern of the emergence of fundamentalism fits the model of religious change described in this chapter. In the past 50 years, the world has faced truly revolutionary changes. The forces of technology and global capitalism have permeated societies and brought people of disparate cultures together in a vast global network. However, this process has not been peaceful and has not produced equity. Livelihoods in all regions, from cloth dyeing in West Africa to family farming in America’s Midwest, have been undermined. The gap between the wealthy and the poor, both within societies and between them, has grown. Governments that seemed to offer the possibility of peace and prosperity have been discredited. Perhaps even more important, new means of communication, from cable news networks to social media, have allowed political parties and pressure groups around the world to fan the flames of grievance to a white-hot intensity and then use this anger to gain and maintain political power.

When faced with profound change, people look for stability and certainty. For some, fundamentalism of various kinds seems to hold this promise. Much (but not all) fundamentalism is nativistic; it presents a call to purification, to a return to the society and values of an earlier time, a time that believers understand as better and more holy than the current era. For this reason, it is often tied to political nationalism. However, specific local histories also play an extremely important role in the emergence of fundamentalisms. It would be impossible, for example, to explain the development of ISIS without understanding the events surrounding the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. The BJP cannot be understood apart from the long history of colonialism and independence in India.

The forces that provide rich ground for fundamentalism do not seem likely to abate any time soon. In fact, continual political and technological change seems likely to create even more extreme dislocations in the future. The various fundamentalisms will probably continue to experience strong growth. This poses an extraordinarily difficult problem. On the one hand, people are surely entitled to their religious beliefs. Most people who might be classified as fundamentalist are innocent of any wrongdoing; they neither promote nor condone violence. They live peacefully with neighbors of different religious beliefs. On the other hand, fundamentalist beliefs have been repeatedly implicated in murderous violence.

There is no doubt that much violence is enflamed by the harsh political and economic conditions of life and by the subversion of longstanding cultural practices. Promoting prosperity, more equitable distribution of resources, greater cultural sensitivity, and more responsive and honest government will certainly reduce popular support for violence. However, many political interests seek power by doing exactly the opposite of this. Further, some believers in all fundamentalist traditions understand the world in absolutist terms and see violence as a divinely ordained response. In some cases, they look to violence as a sign of the world's end, the return or appearance of a messiah, and/or the beginning of an age of redemption (Sells, 2013). Programs of social and political advancement will not change their minds.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: THE GLOBALIZATION OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

Will America Be More or Less Religious in the Future?

The United States is one of the world's most religious, wealthy nations. When the French traveler and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831, the religiosity of Americans was the first thing that struck his attention (1956/1835–1840, p. 319). Additionally, the United States has a long history of religious diversity.

In that same era, the French diplomat Talleyrand is reported to have complained that the United States had 32 religions but only one sauce (T. Smith, 2002).

Today, the United States is still a very religious nation; about 90% of Americans say they believe in God, though this may overstate the true number (Cox, 2018b). However, Americans appear to be becoming less religious and less likely to identify with any particular religion. Polls have closely tracked religion in the United States for many years. In 1948, 91% of Americans identified as Christians, and 2% said they had no religious identification. By 2007, only 78% identified as Christian, and by 2021, that number had dropped still further to 63%. At the same time, the number with no religious affiliation has risen dramatically, to 16% in 2007 and almost 30% in 2021 (Smith, 2021; Newport, 2009). In 2021, only about 22% of Americans said they attended a religious service weekly, down from more than one in three a quarter century earlier, while more than 30% say they never attend (Gallup, 2018; Statistica, 2022; Duffin, 2022). Membership in churches, synagogues, and mosques has fallen from a post–World War II high of 76% in 1945 to a low of 47% in 2021 (Jones, 2021). The decline is particularly drastic among young people.

At the same time, U.S. religious diversity is increasing. There have been Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities in the United States since the 19th century—and, in some cases, earlier—but these groups have grown enormously over the past several decades. In *A New Religious America* (2001), Diana Eck of Harvard University’s Pluralism Project reported that the changes in U.S. immigration policies that have drawn new immigrants from India, Pakistan, China, Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere have resulted in large increases in minority religions. These religions have drawn new American converts as well.

In the 1970s, members of non–Judeo-Christian religions accounted for less than 1% of the U.S. population. By 2014, that number had grown to about 4%. Estimates of the membership of many religions are controversial, but in rough numbers, the Muslim population in the United States is almost 3 million, and there are about 2.3 million

Buddhists and the same number of Hindus (Pew Research Center, 2016). Los Angeles, home to many Asian immigrants, is “the most complex Buddhist city on Earth” (Eck, 1993).

One result of the growth of these religions has been an explosion in the construction of places of worship. There are Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques, and Islamic learning centers in most large U.S. cities. Although these religious institutions celebrate their respective traditions, they have in many cases become Americanized, offering classes, youth programs, and scout troops—programs similar to those often offered by churches and synagogues.

As religions expand, they often meet with hostility. In a 2017 Pew Research Center poll, two thirds of white Evangelical Christians said that Islam is not part of mainstream American society (Lipka, 2017). Hindus and Buddhists have also frequently faced opposition. Zoning boards have sometimes denied them permission to build places of worship, and some corporations have tried to prohibit traditional garb such as headscarves. The conservative Christian Family Research Council attacked the U.S. House of Representatives for allowing a Hindu to offer the daily prayer. Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Coalition, has repeatedly attacked Islam, calling it a religion that seeks to control, dominate, or, if need be, destroy others.

Despite some incidents of bigotry, most Americans have responded with tolerance to the expansion of religious diversity. A good indication of this was the public reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although about 700 hate crimes were committed against Muslims and Hindus in the month that followed the attack, the overwhelming majority of Americans rejected hatred and reacted with support. In one incident, an attack on a mosque in Toledo, a Christian radio station called for people to come to the mosque and pray in solidarity with its members. More than 1,500 individuals of all faiths came to join hands around the mosque. Around the nation, political and religious leaders from all groups and parties called for tolerance and support for the American Muslim community. More recently, after an arsonist attacked a mosque in Tampa, Florida, in February 2017, members of the region’s

Jewish community donated tens of thousands of dollars toward its repair (Marrero, 2017). Strong majorities in the United States say they would be willing to accept Muslims as neighbors and family members (Sahgal & Mohamed, 2019). At the same time, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a group that tracks discrimination against Muslims, reported more than 6,000 complaints of anti-Muslim discrimination in 2020, a 9% increase since 2018 (CAIR Foundation, 2021).

Mosques and temples are increasingly joining churches and synagogues on the American landscape. Though they face backlash, they are well accepted by most Americans. But if the acceptance of religious diversity holds a promise for members of minority religions, it hides a danger as well. Pressures for assimilation are strong, and it is difficult for members of minority religions to preserve their beliefs, practices, and identity.

Key Questions

1. Do you believe the increasing diversity of religion in the United States will result in meaningful changes in U.S. politics?
2. In many countries, religious groups have fought each other. Thus far, this has not happened in the United States. Why do you think this is the case? Will there be religious violence in the American future?
3. How have religions in the United States influenced one another? Have you incorporated beliefs and practices from various religions into your own beliefs? Will you in the future?

SUMMARY

1. What characteristics do all religions have in common? The enormous variety in people’s beliefs and practices worldwide makes religion difficult to define. However, all religions are composed of stories; make extensive use of symbols; have immeasurable beings, powers, and states; involve rituals; have

specific practitioners; and undergo change.

2. Describe several functions of religion. Through religion, people create meaning and order in their world. They explain aspects of the physical and social environment, reduce anxiety in risky situations, and increase social solidarity. Religion plays a role in education, in the maintenance of social boundaries and inequalities, and in regulating the relationship of a group of people to their natural environment.
3. What are sacred narratives and what roles do they play in religion? Sacred narratives, sometimes called myths, are stories that express religious ideas. Sacred narratives explain and validate or legitimize beliefs, values, and customs.
4. What is the importance of symbols in religion? Religious symbols are a means by which abstract ideas can be expressed in terms that most people can grasp.
5. What roles do supernatural beings and powers play in religion? Most religions assume the world to be populated with nonempirical beings. Religions teach that such beings have life, personality, and power. Some common forms are gods, spirits, and tricksters. Additionally, religions usually postulate that people, objects, or places may be imbued with spiritual power or mana.
6. What is a religious ritual and what is the role of liminality in ritual? A religious ritual is a ceremonial act or a repeated stylized gesture involving the use of religious symbols used for specific occasions. Through ritual, people enact their religion. Many rituals involve liminality, or “betweeness.” In states of liminality, normal social rules may be overturned and people may experience temporary states of equality and oneness, or communitas.
7. What are rites of passage and rites of intensification? A rite of passage is a public ritual that marks a person’s transition from one status to another. Examples of rites of passage include initiation rituals, marriages, and funerals. A rite of intensification is a ritual that strengthens group identity and reinforces the values and norms of the community. Rites of intensification often involve the use of totems, animals, plants, or other aspects of the natural world that are held to be ancestral to a group or have a strong relationship with it.

8. What are prayer, sacrifice, and magic? What are the key differences among them? Prayer, sacrifice, and magic are rituals that individuals and groups use to interact with the world of the supernatural. Most religions include examples of all three. The key difference between the three is the degree to which people believe their own actions determine outcomes.
9. What are shamans and where are they found? Shamans, who are found in most societies, are religious practitioners whose legitimacy depends on their ability to achieve direct contact with the supernatural world. In some cases, they achieve this ability through a vision quest. Shamans are not members of bureaucracies and often mediate between their communities and the supernatural world. They often have extensive knowledge of local medicines and are key health care providers in many societies.
10. What are priests and where are they found? Priests are professional religious specialists who hold offices in bureaucracies. Although a priest's authority depends on their official position, they may also use ecstatic techniques to contact the supernatural. Priests are typical of socially stratified societies.
11. What is the difference between witchcraft and sorcery? Witchcraft and sorcery are common elements of belief in many societies. Some anthropologists differentiate between witches and sorcerers. Witches are people whose evil thoughts can harm people. Sorcerers are believed to manipulate objects to magically affect people for both good and evil purposes.
12. What are the effects of accusations of witchcraft and sorcery? Although people do perform magic, accusations that others are sorcerers or witches probably have a greater effect on society. Such accusations may function to promote conformity and explain catastrophic events.
13. What are the varieties of religious prophecy and under what conditions are they most likely to occur? Prophecies generally look back to a previous time (nativistic), look forward to a utopian future (vitalistic), or merge elements of two or more religious systems (syncretic). Prophecies are most likely to be successful under conditions of oppression, radical change, and loss of

identity. The ethnography of the Rastafari in this chapter provides an example of a community built around a vitalistic religious prophecy.

14. What was the Ghost Dance and what is the Native American Church? The Ghost Dance was a Native American religious movement of the late 19th century. Ghost Dance prophets envisioned the restoration of Native American power in the western United States. Ghost Dance practices were involved in the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre. The Native American Church, which also originated in the 19th century, is a religious movement teaching that God is accessible to Native Americans through the use of peyote.
15. Under what conditions does fundamentalism occur and what are its characteristics? Fundamentalism tends to occur in times of rapid change. Fundamentalists view religion as the basis for both personal and communal identity and believe that there is a single truth that they can know. They understand the world as a battle between good and evil and believe they are a persecuted minority even when this is not the case. Fundamentalists are selective about the parts of their tradition they emphasize and the parts of modernity they reject.
16. How has religious practice changed in the United States? Today, religion in the United States is increasing in diversity but decreasing in practice. The percentage of Americans identifying as Protestant has fallen sharply, and the number of those who claim no religious identification has risen tenfold. Only 4% of Americans identify as members of non–Judeo-Christian religions today, but this is more than the 1% who did so in the late 1970s.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Popular books such as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2008) and *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Hitchens, 2007) make a strong case against religion. But religion plays an important role in society. Can society exist

without something anthropologists would identify as religion?
2. Rites of passage, rites of intensification, prayer, and magic are important in most people’s lives. How have you experienced any of these in your own life?
3. In cases where shamans and priests exist in the same society, shamans are unlikely to dispute the power of priests, but priests may deeply oppose shamans. Why should this be the case?
4. The term *witch hunt* is often applied to political and social events like the communist scares of the Cold War. Analyze these events using an anthropological understanding of witchcraft accusations.
5. Anthropologists see a strong correlation between social and religious change. Given the rapid globalization of the international economy, do you believe that religious violence is likely to increase or decrease in the next century?

Key Terms

animatism (p. 368)

animism (p. 362)

antistructure (p. 370)

communitas (p. 370)

contagious magic (p. 374)

cosmology

divination (p. 374)

Ghost Dance (p. 384)

god (p. 368)

imitative magic (p. 373)

liminal (p. 369)

magic (p. 373)

mana (p. 368)

messianic (p. 383)

millenarian (p. 383)

monotheistic (p. 368)

myths (p. 365)

nativistic (p. 383)

neopagan

polytheistic (p. 368)

prayer (p. 372)

priest (p. 378)

religion (p. 362)

rite of passage (p. 371)

rites of intensification (p. 371)

ritual (p. 369)

sacred narratives (p. 365)

sacrifice (p. 373)

shaman

sorcery (p. 380)

syncretism (p. 383)

totem (p. 371)

totemism (p. 371)

trickster (p. 368)

vision quest (p. 376)

vitalistic (p. 383)

Wiccan

witchcraft (p. 380)

Notes

1. More than 900 died in People’s Temple mass suicide and murder November 18, 1978. In the spring of 1993, 86 died when members of the Branch Davidian religious sect battled the US government. On March 26, 1997, 39 members of the Heaven’s Gate religious group committed mass suicide.

2. In other places in India, the same holiday celebrates the triumph of Vishnu over the demon king Hiranyakashipu.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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On the North of Jamaica, lies the United States. Below it, on the left side lies the Gulf of Mexico.

It is further surrounded by different islands such as Cuba, Bahamas, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos, and Cayman. They are surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the North and the Caribbean Sea in the South.

On the Southern portion of the map lies Nicaragua, Costa Rice, Panama, and Colombia.

14 CREATIVE EXPRESSION: ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ARTS

Body art is found in cultures worldwide. This picture of 70-year-old Amina Abdel Majid Suleyman from Kobani, Syria, shows tattooing typical of the Kurdish people of that region. The tattoos, called *deq*, are used to increase women’s beauty, identify their family and tribe, and magically protect them and increase their fertility.

Jodi Hilton/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

Learning Objectives

1. Describe some of the reasons that people make art and give examples of symbolism and ritual in art.
2. Compare the ways that art expresses cultural themes using the examples of manga, anime, and cockfighting.
3. Analyze the roles that art can play in politics. Give examples of the use of art to promote political ends.
4. Assess the degree to which art reflects cultural identity and personal identity in different societies.
5. Examine the ways in which art is used to represent “the other,” including the role of orientalism in Western art.
6. Survey the effect of the international art market and tourism on art.
7. Evaluate the ways that censorship affects the arts in different cultural contexts.

Creative expression is a universal aspect of human experience; there is no known culture without it. In every society, people express themselves in ways that go beyond the need for physical survival. Everywhere there are forms of expression that are guided by aesthetic principles involving imagination, beauty, skill, and style. These activities are called the **arts**. In this chapter, we use the broadest definition of that term and include painting, architecture, sculpture, carving, pottery, weaving, music, song, dance, sport, and dramatic performance, as well as written or spoken forms such as stories and poetry. From the very broad anthropological perspective used in this chapter, tea drinking is an art form in Japan, bullfighting is an art form in Spain, and calligraphy is an art form in China and the Islamic Middle East. Through art, people interpret the world with images and symbols that express basic themes, values, and perceptions of reality in ways that are culturally meaningful.

Evidence of human artistic expression goes back to the very dawn of the human species. Tools manufactured according to aesthetic principles, the embellishment of burial sites, and the sophisticated cave paintings and sculptures of prehistoric peoples all indicate the connection between the arts and being human. Archaeological sites in Zambia provide some of the earliest evidence for art. At these sites, archaeologists have found pigments and grinding equipment used to make paints between 350,000 and 400,000 years ago (BBC, 2000). No culture today, no matter how simple its technology or how difficult its environment, lacks art.

THE ARTS IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Art takes different forms and serves different purposes in every society. Because the symbols used in art are culturally specific, it is extremely useful to understand art in its cultural context. Anthropologists are interested in both the more obvious meanings and the deeper meanings of symbols, as well as in the ways these meanings are connected to other elements in a culture.

Although artistic expression is universal, creative expression in different cultures attaches to different aspects of culture and has different meanings. Some cultures place a high value on the idea of art for art’s sake,[1] but in most societies, art is not produced only for pleasure or as an expression of the genius of its creator. It is embedded in other activities. For example, most Inuit languages do not have a separate word for art. Rather, artificial objects are often lumped together as “that which has been made by hand,” regardless of the purpose of the object (Auger, 2005). This does not mean that the Inuit do not have aesthetic values. It means that their art was traditionally applied to the manufacture of objects that had primarily instrumental value, such as tools, amulets, and weapons.

In today’s wealthy societies, many creative acts such as dancing, weaving, singing, and playing a musical instrument are considered to be a special category of behavior called the arts. But, historically, these have usually been done as part of cultural activities such as politics, religion, and exchange. In all societies, some people are recognized as more competent in these skills than others, but this competence does not necessarily translate into the specialized role of artist.

Current-day wealthy societies often emphasize originality and innovation. The idea that artists are tortured loners or eccentrics has become popular in the past two centuries, especially in Western countries. However, this is not the case in most societies (and is likely more myth than reality even in Western society). In most societies, art is a social skill. Artists create their work for others to use and to celebrate and support their society, or they create it to critique key aspects of social structure.

Making art is recognized as a creative process in all cultures, though not necessarily an innovative one (Price, 1989). Many cultures do not prize originality—the creation of something entirely new—in their arts but rather value the creation of interesting and endless variations on already established artistic themes (Vogel 1991, p. 20). Indeed, this characterized Western art from the fall of Rome to the Renaissance. For example, there are a great many similar images of the Virgin Mary. The stability of Western art during this era is partly explained by its connection to religion. When art is part of religious practice or devotion, indifference or opposition to originality in art is common. There may be only one correct way to create an artistic object or perform an artistic act. Among the Navajo, for example, song is an essential part of religious ritual, and songs must be performed identically every time. In other Navajo arts, such as weaving, styles remain stable, but innovation is common and often prized.

Why People Create Art

People create art for many purposes. These include expressing the symbolic elements in ritual, displaying cultural themes, confirming social hierarchies by making the power of the state or the governmental elite visible, resisting authority by giving expression to voices from the margins, and expressing personal and social identities. Both early and modern states use art to symbolize their own power, as we saw in the ethnography on the Asante state in Chapter 7. Sometimes the rules for the creation and display of artistic endeavors are determined by elites to confirm and extend their power. For example, the sumptuary laws described in Chapter 7 help elites control the symbols of power. Art may also be used to resist the domination of the state and elites. Graffiti is sometimes an example of this. Art is also used to intensify ideas of nationhood, to express ethnic identities and record ethnic histories, and to make political statements. Art is used to express personal identity, social status, or identification with a particular group in society. This is illustrated in art as varied as the ways in which Pakistani truck drivers paint their trucks or the use of tattoos by U.S. college students.

Art is often central to ritual, whether in artifact, movement, or sound. In many cultures, artistic expression in ritual is a powerful way of communicating with and attempting to control the natural and supernatural worlds. In foraging cultures, for example, dance movements that imitate the movements of animals are often believed to exert control over those animals, leading to successful hunts.

Art as Ritual: Paleolithic Cave Art

Our understanding of the early connections between art and ritual owes much to the study of Paleolithic cave art. Cave paintings are among the most spectacular cultural remains left by early *Homo sapiens*. The earliest cave paintings are about 39,000 years old and are found in Australia and Indonesia (Marchant, 2016). But the best known are in caves in Europe, particularly in protected valleys in eastern France and northern Spain.

The cave of Altamira in Spain and the Lascaux and Grotte Chauvet in France are the sites of the most elaborate cave paintings (Figure 14.1). Ice Age hunters of reindeer, mammoth, bison, and horses put images on rock faces deep in these caves. The artists used naturally occurring bulges and dips in the rock to make their animal portrayals more realistic. In addition to painting, they also made jewelry and carved and engraved human figures and ritual and ceremonial objects. They placed elaborate grave goods in burial sites and made patterned notations that may indicate some form of recordkeeping.

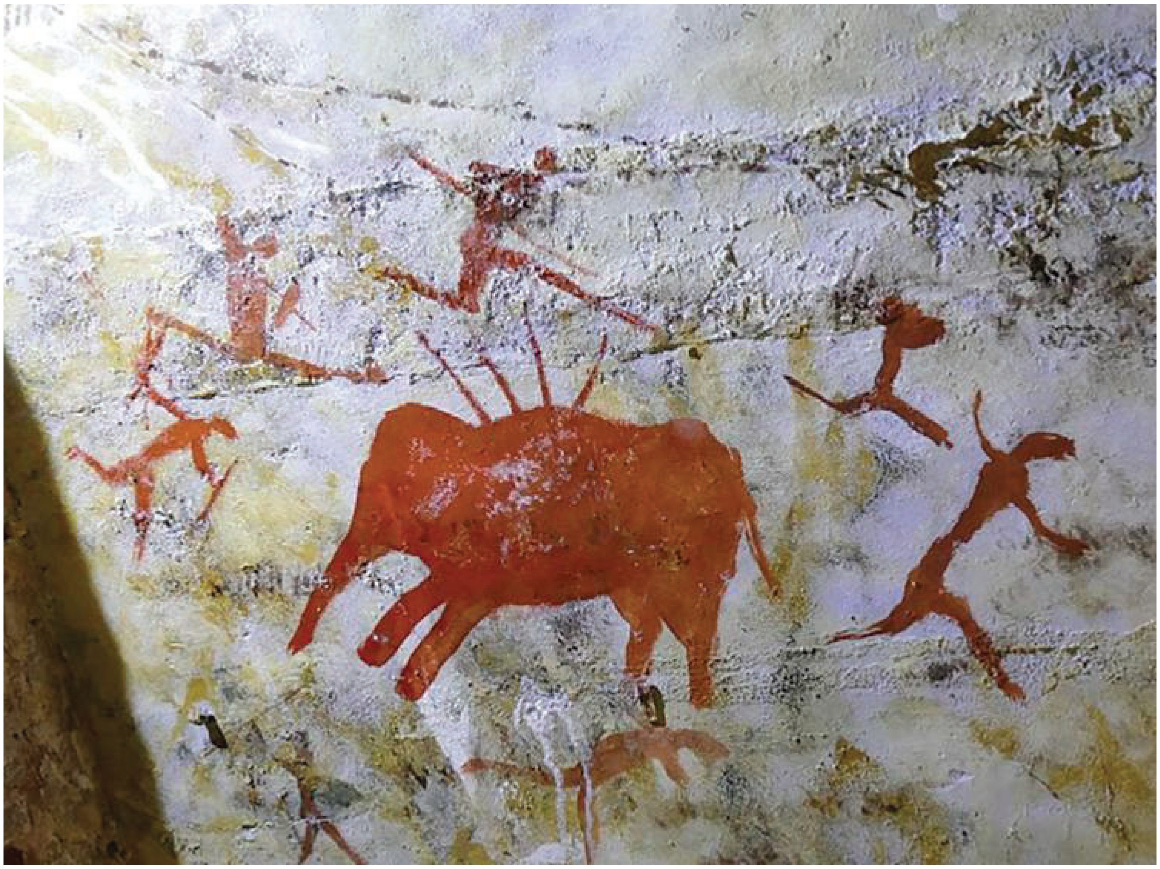


Figure 14.1 Ancient paintings in European caves show

animals, human figures, and actions that have been interpreted as rituals. Here, a painting made more than 12,000 years ago in the Altamira cave in Spain seems to depict a hunt.

Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

The hunters clearly knew every detail of the anatomy and behavior of the animals in their territory. Deep in the caves, with no animal models to copy, their paintings are rendered with magnificent realism. Many of the images indicate the sexual and seasonal characteristics or behavior of various animal species. For example, stags are shown baying in the autumn rut. A bison bull bellows, and mammoth bulls butt each other. One bison licks a summer insect bite, and another is shown with molting fur in the summer.

People did not live in the painted caves. Perhaps they visited them seasonally or maybe only for special occasions. In caves used as homes, entirely different images, such as signs and symbols in different shapes, were engraved on stones, bones, and sometimes broken ivory.

Archaeologists offer different interpretations of cave art. Because many of the images are of animals that were commonly eaten, some anthropologists argue that they were drawn as part of ceremonies intended to magically increase the chances of a successful hunt. The images might contain encoded information about hunting techniques and other information useful for survival in the harsh conditions of the Ice Age (Strauss, 1991). However, one weakness of this theory is that the paintings include images of animals that do not seem to have been commonly eaten. Lions, for example, were not intended as a food source, nor would the hunter have sought their increase, but portrayals of them are common.

A more accepted theory is that many of the images were made for ritual use. The association of animals with varying signs and symbols reinforces this view: Some animals are marked with handprints or abstract signs, whereas others are pictured with plant forms. One hand marking appears to be that of an adult holding an infant’s hand to the wall by the child’s wrist, and this has been interpreted as an act of ritual participation performed by the adult for the infant (Marshack, 1978). Infrared photography indicates that many of the animals were overpainted with other animals or reused by repainting and adding symbols. This suggests that the ritual of painting the animal may have been more important than the finished image—the process was more important than the product.

Yet another, more controversial, interpretation is that these paintings depict things seen by shamans in altered states of consciousness and that the caves were painted as part of religious rituals or were designed to intensify the experience of such rituals. This is supported by the fact that many figures have both animal and human characteristics. This is typical of some types of hallucination (Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 1988).

Because cave paintings were made by many different artists over a 20,000-year period and show many different subjects, it is unlikely that any single theory can explain them all, and each of the theories mentioned may hold true for some cases.

Art, Culture, and Symbolism

The arts are a means of using symbols to interpret the world. Art expresses the basic themes, values, and perceptions of reality in ways that are culturally meaningful. Art is thus a reflection of cultural values and patterns and, at the same time, a means of intensifying the experience of these values. Much of the power of the arts comes from their symbolic nature, which leaves their production and performance open to a variety of interpretations. An artistic product or performance may convey a basic cultural theme or combine several themes, some of which may be in opposition to one another. Anthropologists try to understand both the surface and the deep symbolic structures through which the arts communicate and elicit responses from their participants and audiences.

However, to say that art uses symbols is not to say that it is exclusively symbolic. In some cultures, art products or performances—whether paintings, masks, sculptures, sounds, or movements—are understood as the thing visualized. For example, mask dancing in many African cultures is both symbolic and real. It is symbolic in that the costumes dancers wear have specific meanings, but it is real in the sense that the masked dancer does not represent the supernatural being but is understood to have *become* the supernatural being. Similarly, objects may represent power, or objects may be powerful in themselves. For example, among the Bakongo people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, an *nkisi nkondi* is a sculpture that is a container of spiritual forces (Figure 14.2). *Nknondi* means “hunter” in the Kongo language, and the *nkisi nkondi* figures are made to help magically find sources of trouble. *Nkisi* are created by a sculptor and a ritual specialist working together (Lagamma, 2008). The magical power of the *nkisi nkondi* is activated by driving a nail into it.

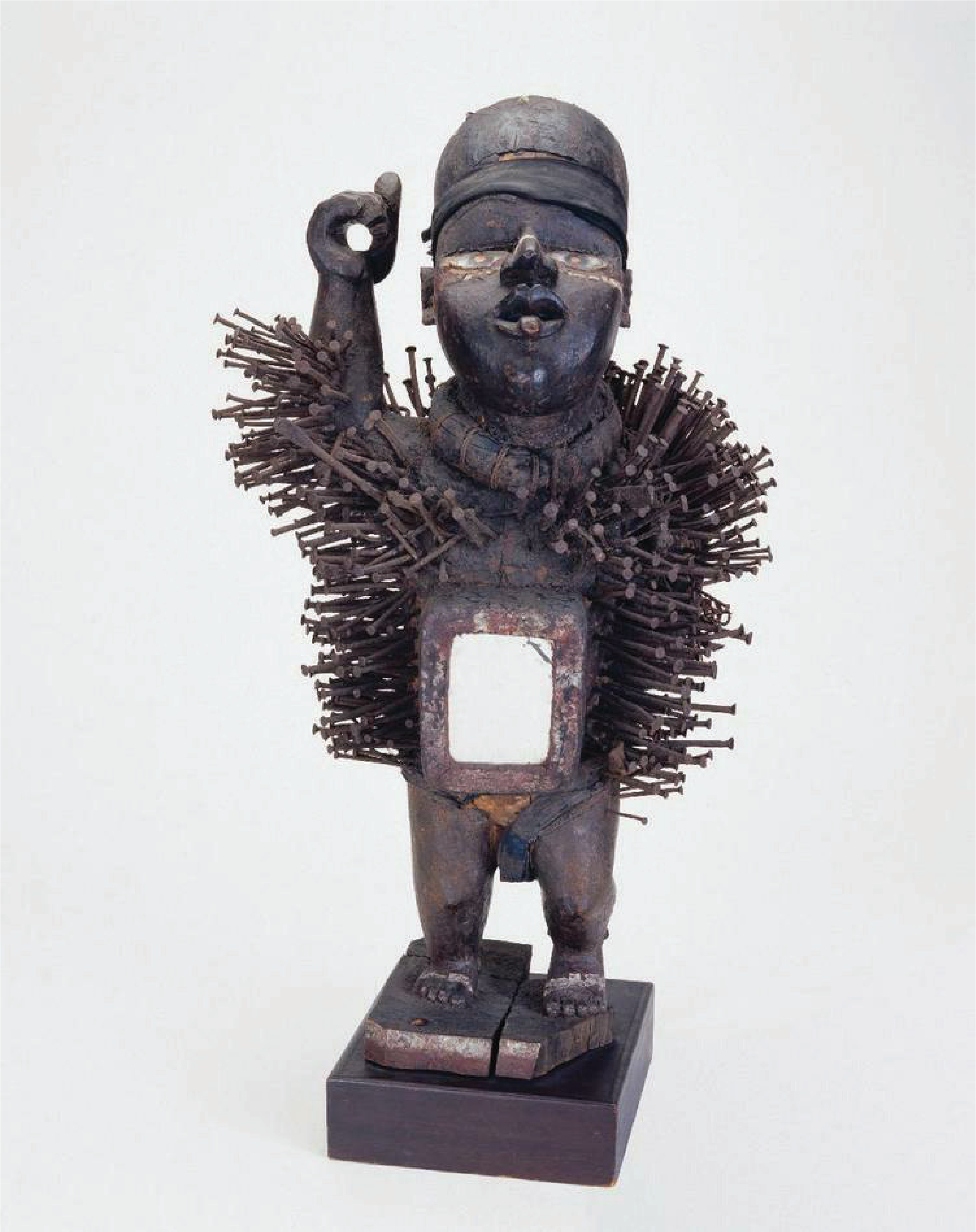


Figure 14.2 Sometimes art is not only symbolic but contains or enacts aspects of the physical or spiritual world. This *nkisi* figure from the Democratic Republic of Congo is understood as physically containing the *nkisi*

spiritual force.

SSPL/Getty Images

The idea of an object of art being itself powerful may seem distant from our own experience, but in a sense, it really isn’t. Consider, for example, a painting by Rembrandt. The painting is symbolic of something. However, the painting itself also has a certain kind of power. A replica, no matter how perfect, may have the same symbolic content but would never be as valuable or important as the original. We are willing to travel and pay to see originals. A museum of perfect replicas would have few visitors.

Even in cultures where artistic forms are not viewed as containing spiritual power, the arts are always powerful means of symbolic communication. They convey knowledge and provoke emotions that have both individual and cultural dimensions. Each culture has specific artistic symbols that stand for things or events in nature and human society or that are associated with certain emotions. Thus, one needs to know the cultural meaning assigned to each specific artistic element to understand what a work of art means within its culture of origin.

In Western music, for example, the use of the minor scale conveys the emotion of sadness. Various other musical forms are traditionally associated with other emotions. These artistic conventions can be used to evoke emotions because people in that culture have been taught the association. Similarly, in the United States, a story that begins “Once upon a time” signals that it is not about real events and people.

In Hindu culture, the image of Shiva, Lord of the Dance, is deeply symbolic. In this very common sculpture or painting, Shiva is always shown the same way (Figure 14.3). He stands crushing the dwarf demon Apasmara, who embodies ignorance. He is surrounded by a ring of fire, symbolizing the entirety of existence. His upper-right hand holds a drum symbolizing creation, and his upper-left hand holds a flame symbolizing destruction. His lower-right hand gestures, bestowing protection, and his lower-left hand points to his foot, reminding us that all must join the dance of creation and destruction.

Figure 14.3 Shiva, Lord of the Dance, is a common religious representation in India. Each of Shiva's actions is associated with a specific symbolism.

iStockphoto.com/f9photos

Each artistic endeavor embodies an artistic style, which refers to a characteristic manner of expression. Different cultures (as well as different artists) have different artistic styles. Although all cultures experience stylistic changes in their arts, aesthetic principles change slowly.

Cultures also differ in their artistic emphases. In some cultures, masks and painting are the most important media for the expression of aesthetic values and technical skills. In other cultures, verbal skills are more important. This is reflected in the wealth of myths, folktales, and word games present in these societies. Even where cultures seem to have a similar emphasis on an artistic form, the meanings attached to that form may be very different. For example, calligraphy (decorative writing) is an important art form in both China and the Islamic Middle East, but it is associated with quite different meanings in these cultures. In China, written language is considered one of the defining attributes of Chinese civilization and is a key source of Chinese cultural identity and unity. Writing was the ruler's instrument of legitimacy, and it appeared on state monuments and documents. Gradually, it became revered as an art form. In Islam, calligraphy is the most respected of the graphic arts because it is the visual representation of the Koran. Islam forbids creating images of humans, and this prohibition is often extended to the depiction of animals. The result has often been an emphasis on abstract geometric designs and calligraphy in much Islamic art (Schuyler, 1995).

ART AND THE EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL THEMES

Because artistic performances and products emerge from shared cultural themes, the arts can heighten the feeling of belonging to a particular group by generating intense emotions. Thus, art forms not only are mirrors of culture but also heighten cultural and social integration by displaying and confirming widely held social values. The powerful artistic symbols of a society express universal themes such as death, pride, and gender relations in ways that are culturally specific and therefore culturally compelling, even when their content is not consciously articulated.

Art may express the repressed aspects of a culture. Popular art and culture have often been analyzed in terms of how they provide a direct view of the repressed unconscious of cultures. In Chapter 11, we examined how bullfighting in Spain symbolically and artistically represents ideals of male gender behavior. In the examples of manga and anime in Japanese popular culture and the cockfight in Bali, all discussed below, we see examples of how diverse arts function in the display and confirmation of cultural themes. Later in the chapter, we show that art may often subvert rather than support culture as well.

Manga and Anime in Japan

Anime (animation) and **manga** (illustrated novels) are among the most important aspects of post–World War II popular culture in Japan. Anime, often based on animating manga, is very familiar in the West and throughout the world. Anime and manga are found in films produced by major U.S. and Japanese studios, video games, children's toys, Internet content, and commercial products. These art forms have also been taken up by a pop art movement, whose work is displayed in museums and art galleries in Japan and abroad. They have also spawned a subculture in Japan called *otaku*. The term was popularized by Nakamori Akio, who was critical of the subculture and saw its members as obsessed and socially isolated. The *otaku* were further defamed by their association with a famous serial killer of the late 1980s, who, the media claimed, was unable to differentiate fact from fiction. However, both criticisms are unfair. *Otaku* are members of friend groups who are deeply immersed in the world of manga and anime. They take possession of the imaginary worlds of games, manga, and anime and approach them creatively, building on them through drawing, customization, fan fiction, and cosplay, a phenomenon called *nijisousaku* or “secondary production” (Rich, 2016). In Tokyo, *otaku* culture is centered in Akihabara, a section of the city previously dominated by electronics stores (Morikawa, 2012).

Manga and anime are sometimes associated with another major pop culture theme, *kawaii*, or “cuteness” (Figure 14.4). Cuteness is often displayed in images of Lolita-like preadolescent, seemingly innocent schoolgirls who convey a sexual knowingness that belies their appearance. Hello Kitty is a well-known expression of *kawaii*. Hello Kitty is a big-eyed, beribboned, expressionless pussycat character (without a mouth to express emotion) whose image appears on over 50,000 products in Japan and throughout the world. The public relations manager for Sanrio, the owner of the Hello Kitty design, explains its success by saying, “Hello Kitty doesn’t judge. She lets you feel how you feel without forcing you to question why” (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Fans know that Hello Kitty is not intended to be a Japanese cat but rather an 8-year-old girl who lives outside of London. She even has a pet cat of her own called Charmmy Kitty (Petri, 2014; Yano, 2013). Cat or not, global sales of Hello Kitty licensed products reached $4.4 billion annually in the mid-2010s (Woodgate, 2017).

Figure 14.4 *Kawaii*, or cuteness, is a theme in Japanese popular culture. Here, artist and student Kanpai is seen dressed in *kawaii* style in the Harajuku section of Tokyo in 2017.

Onnie A Koski/Getty Images

On the apocalyptic side of this popular culture format are monsters like Godzilla, who was awakened from eons of submarine sleep by a hydrogen bomb explosion. Godzilla exhibits radiation-induced physical deformities and engages in nightly attacks on Tokyo, which reduce the city and its screaming population to ashes.

Artist and analyst Takashi Murakami sees both *kawaii* and disaster movies such as the Godzilla series in the context of World War II and the relationship between Japan and the United States. He argues that Japan has not adequately examined its responsibility for the trauma caused by its militarism, its role in World War II, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the prolonged U.S. occupation that followed the Japanese defeat. Murakami holds that the denial of these traumas has created displaced emotions such as anxiety, shame, and a pervasive sense of impotence that find their outlet in popular culture (R. Smith, 2005). This is reflected in Japanese fascination with fantasies of violence and power, such as the Godzilla-like monsters and mushroom-cloud explosions that are so frequently used in Japanese animation. In a seeming contradiction, this sense of powerlessness also shows up in the obsession with “cuteness.” Murakami’s analysis fails to account for the diversity of manga and anime, their intense creativity, and the worldwide appeal of these Japanese art forms. However, it does point to the role of art in helping us understand and come to terms with a world that is both dangerous and out of our control.

Although anime and manga display Japanese cultural and psychological themes, they have become incredibly popular worldwide. There has been a rich cross-fertilization between American and Japanese popular culture in manga and anime. In the United States, numerous Japanese-style cartoons and films have been produced, including Genndy Tartakovsky's *Samurai Jack*, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and Rooster Teeth's *RWBY*.

This cultural exchange goes in both directions, and American culture has been incorporated into anime and manga. In Japan, Tokashi Okazaki's *Afro Samurai* manga relied heavily on elements of hip-hop and other aspects of American culture; it spawned an anime series, a TV movie, and a video game. *Tenjho Tenge, Infinite Ryvius*, and *Samurai Champloo* also include American elements, particularly hip-hop dance and music. As Condry (2005) has noted, the intense interchange between Japanese and U.S. youth culture is often ahead of commercialization. The Internet, television, and other media allow instant access to events and fashion in New York, Los Angeles, and Tokyo. Members of different cultures pick up styles and statements that appeal to them. They recast elements of culture to give them meaning within their own context. Hip-hop, for example, has deep roots in the African American urban experience, but this doesn't prevent Japanese artists from making it their own as well.

Art and Deep Play

There are many kinds of cultural performances, such as games and sports, in which participants and spectators are joined together in experiences that have functions like those of the arts (Geertz, 1973a). Clifford Geertz called these performances **deep play**. Examples of deep play include cockfighting in Bali, falcon hunting in Pakistan and other parts of Muslim Asia, football in the United States, and bullfighting in Spain. All of these are expressive forms of culture that heighten emotions, display compelling aspects of social structure and culture, reinforce cultural identities, and, most important, allow people to viscerally experience (and maybe think about) aspects of their own cultures.

The Balinese Cockfight

Cockfights are a consuming passion of the Balinese that reveal much about Balinese culture, particularly the competition for prestige among men of different families and social groups (Figure 14.5). Balinese men have an intense identification with their fighting animals and spend much time caring for them, discussing them, and admiring them. The cock (the pun works in both English and Balinese) embodies two opposing Balinese cultural themes. It is both a magnification of the owner’s masculine self and an expression of animality, which in Bali is the direct inversion of what it means to be human. In identifying with his animal, the Balinese man is identifying with his ideal masculine self but also with what his culture most fears, hates, and yet is fascinated by: the powers of darkness that the animals represent. The cockfight embodies the opposition of man and beast, good and evil, the creative power of aroused masculinity, and the destructive power of loosened animality, fused in a bloody drama of violence as cocks with razor-sharp steel spurs attached to their legs fight to the death.

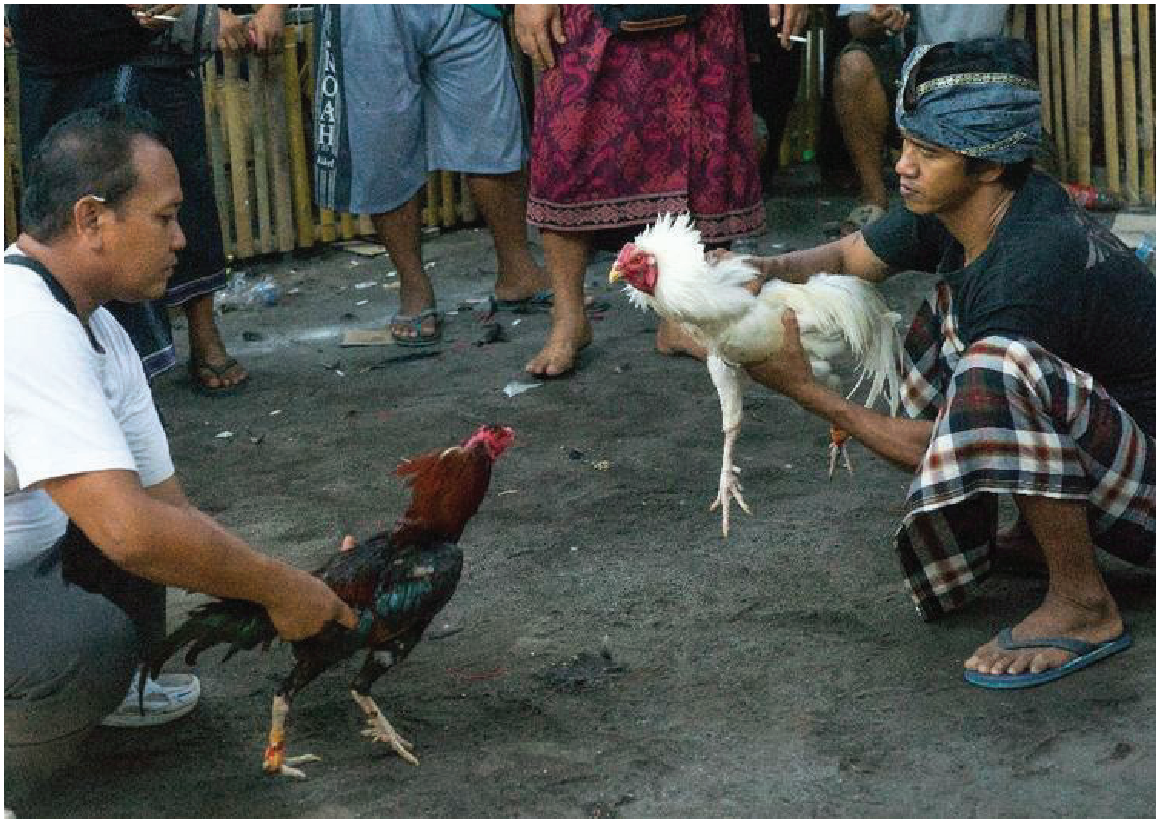


Figure 14.5 Cockfighting in Bali expresses cultural ideas of masculinity, danger, group solidarity, and hierarchy. Here, two men prepare their cocks for fighting near Canggu, Bali in 2015.

Eric Lafforgue/Art In All Of Us/Corbis via Getty Images

Gambling is central to Balinese cockfighting, and bets on the cockfight are a basic part of the competition for prestige that forms its deep play aspect. Cocks represent men, families, and social groups. When the individuals and groups represented have little connection with each other, the betting is likely to be light. However, when the individuals or groups are closely related in status competition or closely linked in the social hierarchy, bets are likely to be large. An individual does not bet on the bird that he believes has the greatest chance of victory (only men bet) but on the cock that represents his group. These matches are likely to be deeply emotional.

The Balinese cockfight is a symbolic contest between male egos, but it is also a symbolic expression of Balinese social hierarchy. Prestige is a driving force in Balinese society and the central driving force of the cockfight, transforming the fight into what Geertz called a “status bloodbath.” When a match involves men of equal status, especially high-status men or men who are personal enemies, the match is felt to be deeper and more emotional.

The Balinese are aware of the deep status concerns involved in cockfighting, which they refer to as “playing with fire without getting burned.” Cockfighting activates village and kin group rivalries and hostilities in “play” form. It comes dangerously and entrancingly close to the expression of open interpersonal and intergroup aggression, something that almost never happens in ordinary Balinese life. But then, the Balinese say cockfights are not quite the same as real aggression because, after all, it is only a cockfight. That is, although people at the cockfight can experience changes in prestige—the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat—cockfights change nothing. A person’s position in the Balinese status hierarchy is set by larger social and economic forces. Winning or losing a cockfight can never really change it. In a way, this is like college (and other) sports. If you are a college basketball fan, in late March, you might get to savor that one shining moment as your school defeats its rival for a national title. However, the game doesn’t really change anything about either school. The prestige of universities is set by overarching social forces and cannot be changed by a basketball game.

ART AND POLITICS

Another important function of the arts is the expression of social structure, particularly the social hierarchy and its relation to power. In politically complex and hierarchical societies, the power embodied in the ruler or the state may be represented through the graphic, oral, architectural, or performing arts. These artistic displays reiterate and legitimate the sources of the ruler’s power and the political structure through which the society is governed.

The sculptural portrayal of Roman emperors presents an interesting example of how art is pressed into the service of power. Statues of many Roman emperors expressed a series of ideals, some of which seem contradictory. In many cases, their faces were made to show a familial resemblance to previous emperors, even when they were unrelated and probably had little in common physically. In addition, since wisdom was associated with age, emperors tended to be portrayed with older faces. However, since emperors were war leaders, they needed to be shown as physically strong. The result was that emperors were often depicted with the facial characteristics of middle age but the physique of athletes in their teens and twenties (Trentinella, 2003; Figure 14.6).

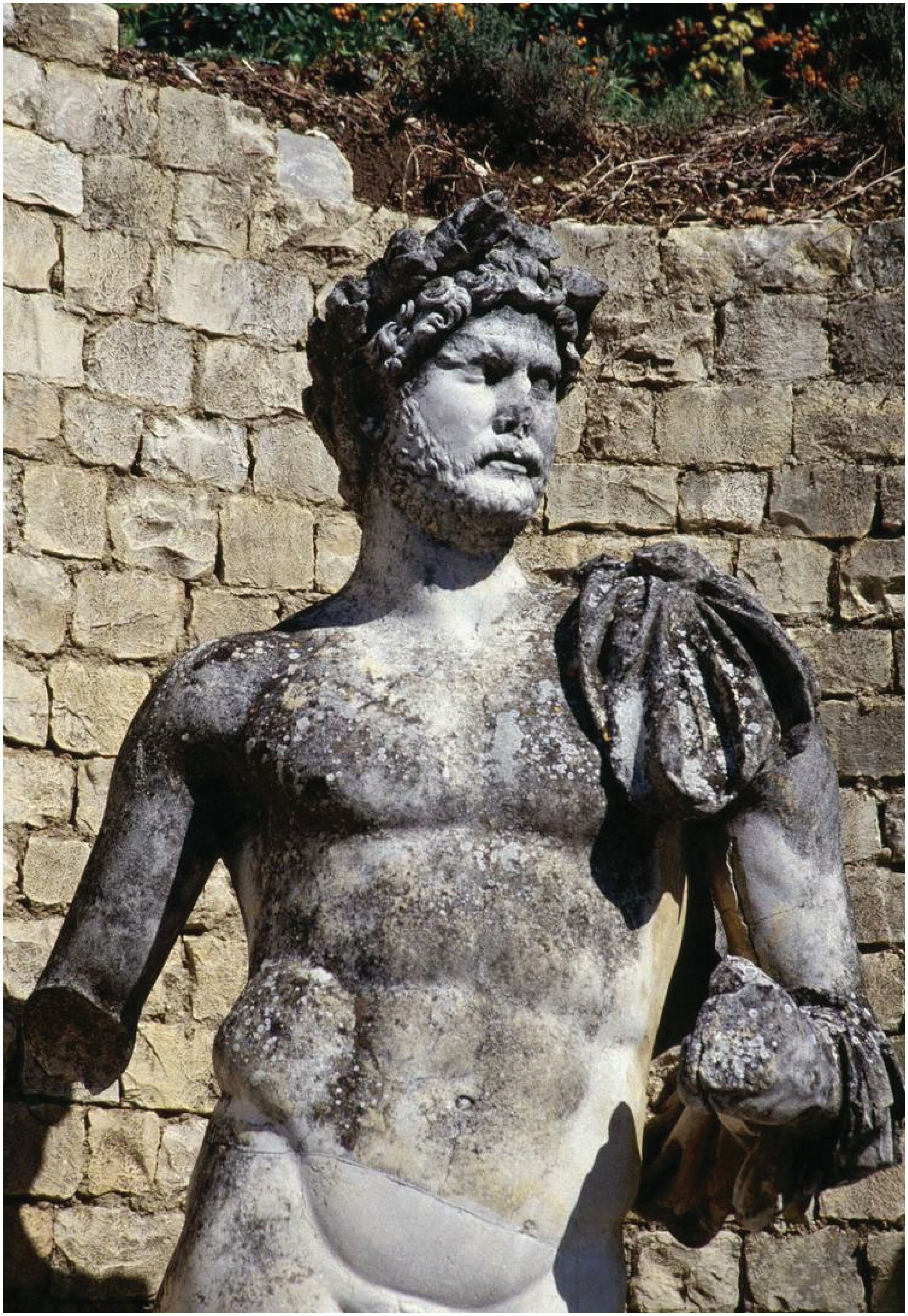


Figure 14.6 Statues of the Roman emperor Hadrian show him with middle-aged facial characteristics, indicating wisdom, but with the athletic body of a far younger man, indicating strength.

DeAgostini/Getty Images

Another example of how the arts legitimize social hierarchy and power, thus contributing to stability, especially in transitional times, are the paintings of colonial Peru. After the Spanish conquest, Inca royalty commissioned indigenous artists to paint portraits of the Inca kings to keep the memory of Inca rulers alive for those claiming royal descent and noble status. Upper-class natives of Peru thus asserted their claims to high status and power in the colonial hierarchy by depicting their illustrious forebears in paintings, the visual language of European culture.

The arts were also central in legitimizing the ruling class in imperial China, especially the emperor (Hearn, 1996). The Chinese believed that only those with knowledge of the past could have a vision of the future. Thus, it was essential for the imperial courts to possess historical writings and paintings to display that knowledge. Throughout Chinese imperial history, figure painting was focused on commemorating the emperor. Portraits of the emperor were often life-sized and had to incorporate the two main Chinese ideals of imperial rule: moral authority and the emperor’s central role in bureaucratic administration. Therefore, artists had to depict the emperor with individualized features representing the humanistic Confucian values of compassion and virtue while at the same time conveying the imposing demeanor of the absolute ruler, the Son of Heaven.

Although the arts can help stabilize a society by validating its social hierarchy and expressing its common cultural elements, they can also provide powerful ways to express disunity and conflict within a society, resist state authority, and give voice to members of oppressed or marginalized classes or social groups. Resistance to a prevailing social structure is often an important dimension in folktales and other oral traditions. These may reverse, ridicule, or question the social order.

African American oral traditions, for example, commonly include a trickster character who is smaller and weaker than his opponent but triumphs through his wits rather than through force. Br’er Rabbit stories are a well-known example. They are probably descendants of African trickster tales and have a deep connection with both slavery and the later oppression of African Americans. The stories are a representation of the race-based social structure and a message about how the system can be outsmarted and undone. They also provide a comedic outlet for the frustration and anger that results from oppression.

As the U.S. social structure changed in the 1960s and 1970s and as open protest against the racial caste system increased, African American oral traditions also changed. The “bad man” who openly displayed his arrogance and virility came to supplant the trickster as hero (Abrahams, 1970), and this archetype began to appear in blaxploitation films of the 1970s, such as *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (1971) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), and the hip-hop and gangsta rap of Dr. Dre and Death Row Records in the 1980s and 1990s.

The controversies over the names of schools and other public buildings and the presence of Confederate memorials in many U.S. cities are another example of the relationship between art and politics. Most Confederate memorials were erected in the early years of the 20th century, a time of increased racial oppression and violence against African Americans. In the late 2010s and early 2020s, controversies broke out over these memorials as well as over streets, schools, and other public buildings whose names memorialized the Confederacy or individuals linked to the slave trade or white supremacy. The political importance of these controversies was highlighted by the intense resistance that sometimes accompanied the removal of the names and monuments. In Texas, Maryland, Tennessee, Louisiana, and many other places, Confederate memorials were removed overnight to limit protest. However, in Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida, laws that forbid the removal of Confederate monuments or make it extremely difficult have been enacted.

Confederate memorials are strongly implicated in the racist social order that developed in the United States after the Civil War. Ask yourself how different America would be if, instead of every statue honoring a Confederate, a statue of a slave breaking the bonds of captivity had been erected. This would have reflected and celebrated an entirely different kind of politics.

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Museums and Culture 1: Who Gets to Say?

Museum exhibits were—and are—a major point of contact between different cultures. Museums originated as private collections, national treasure houses, and scientific institutions that sought to preserve disappearing cultures. The earliest museum may have been created more than 2,500 years ago in the Babylonian city of Ur (Fowler, 2003). Many of the great European museums, such as the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London, date back to the mid- to late 1700s. The oldest museum in the United States, the Charleston Museum in South Carolina, opened to the public in 1824. The Tokyo National Museum, the oldest in Japan, opened in 1872.

Most museum collections were originally based on a fascination with physical objects. This stripped such objects of their cultural context. Whether the objects displayed were European paintings, sculptures from Mediterranean antiquity, African masks, or Chinese silk screens, they were shown with little commentary. Visitors marveled at their beauty, oddity, or craftsmanship, but neither collectors nor viewers knew much of the cultural context of their creation or use. For example, African art strongly influenced modernist artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, but they were rarely interested in the cultural context of the art. They simply were fascinated by its forms. Art historians and museum directors similarly focused away from the context in which art was created and toward display without explanation.

Anthropologists had different perspectives. Anthropologists tended to see art in its cultural context. They tried to understand the roles that art played in culture and the conditions of its production and use. They wanted to understand the social and symbolic worlds the art referenced. They argued that museums should present art in its cultural context, explaining what the objects displayed meant to the people who made and used them. In the late 19th century, Franz Boas and Otis Mason disagreed about how material from different cultures should be displayed. Mason believed that artifacts from different places that looked similar or served similar purposes should be shown together. Boas far more persuasively argued that objects should be shown in context: All the objects from a single culture should be shown together (Dall & Boas, 1887). For Boas, objects from a culture could only be properly understood in relation to each other and the worldview of their culture of origin.

Despite Boas’s concern with the contextual display of museum artifacts, with a few notable exceptions, until recently, the people whose culture was depicted in museums or whose artwork was displayed were rarely involved in creating or analyzing the displays. Cultures and their material productions were presented by outsiders. However, this began to change rapidly in the 1990s. One impetus for this was the 1990 passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which required the return of human remains and many cultural artifacts to Native communities. This encouraged engagement between the museums that held these items and the Native Americans they belonged to.

One example of successful engagement in this endeavor was the leadership of Michal M. Ames, the director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia from 1974 to 1997. Ames strove to collaborate with leaders of First Nation (as Native American tribes are called in Canada) communities. He organized exhibitions that were focused on the educational goals of First Nation peoples and consulted with tribal leaders at every stage of the process. Ames set a high standard for collaboration, but he also created controversy both among anthropologists and between the museum and the communities it served (Shelton, 2007). Ames (2005, p. 49) later said, “No one promised that decolonization would be a stroll in the garden.” His work had a profound influence, and similar models of collaboration have spread throughout the world. One good example of this is the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., where anthropologists, museologists, and Native Americans are engaged in a practice of “community curating” (Shannon, 2015). The opening of the museum in 2004 was celebrated by a procession of some 20,000 Native Americans, one of the largest gatherings of its kind (Lovgren, 2004).

Not all of the effects of NAGPRA have been positive. The American Museum of Natural History in New York City has one of the greatest ethnographic collections in the United States. However, its frequently visited cultural exhibitions are woefully out of date; they range from 30 to 116 years old. Emily Martin and Susan Harding (2017) have reported that there are many reasons the museum has failed to bring its exhibits up to date. Some of these are material and financial; for example, renovating the exhibits would be very expensive. Museum directors have also shifted resources toward exhibits that focus on physics and biology, which they believe will bring in more revenue. However, the directors also use NAGPRA as an excuse for not changing the exhibits. They argue that changes would be very complicated because they would involve the museum in extended negotiations with Native communities. Dinosaurs, on the other hand, don't talk back.

Our discussion of museums and culture continues in the "Anthropology Makes a Difference" section of the next chapter.

Art and Cultural History

People often use art to express their sense of their cultural identity through depictions of the past and to link past ideas and events to the present. In many cultures, the most important artistic efforts and performances are those representing ancestors and the continuity of group identity. Because they display culture and history in ways that are visible, tangible, and emotionally compelling, the arts are an important way of interpreting and remembering both an actual and a legendary past.

Native Americans recorded their histories in various ways. All groups told stories that combined historical and fantastical elements and passed these stories from generation to generation. Some groups used material artifacts. For example, the Iroquois carved a record of their chiefs into canes (Frisch, 1976). Such records, whether material or oral, embody the effort of a people to define, explain, and amuse themselves and to keep alive their cultural identity. Many of the old stories told by Native American groups incorporate jokes and demonstrate the resilience of people who have experienced great hardship.

The ledger drawings of some Native American groups are an example of the use of art to record history and preserve cultural identity (C. Greene, 2001; Powers, 2005). **Ledger drawings** got their name from the ledger books obtained from trading posts in which the Native Americans drew their records. They provide a readable historical record, a way for Native Americans to anchor themselves in the real world and locate themselves in history beyond myths and legends

(Figure 14.7).

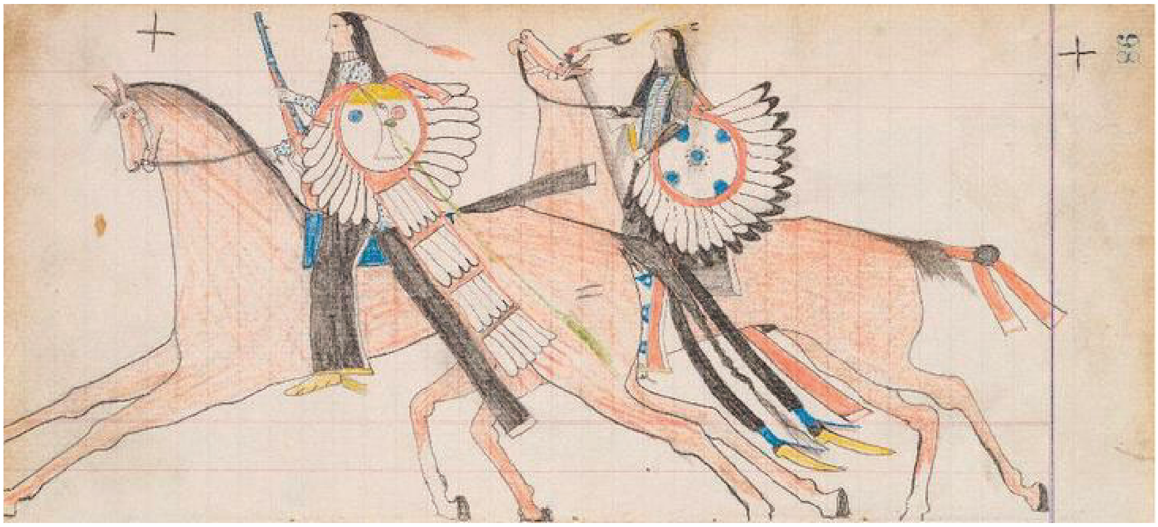


Figure 14.7 Ledger drawings recorded Native American lifeways and history. Pictured here is a drawing called *Off to War* (c. 1882) by the Arapaho artist Frank Henderson (1862–1885).

Artokoloro/Alamy Stock Photo

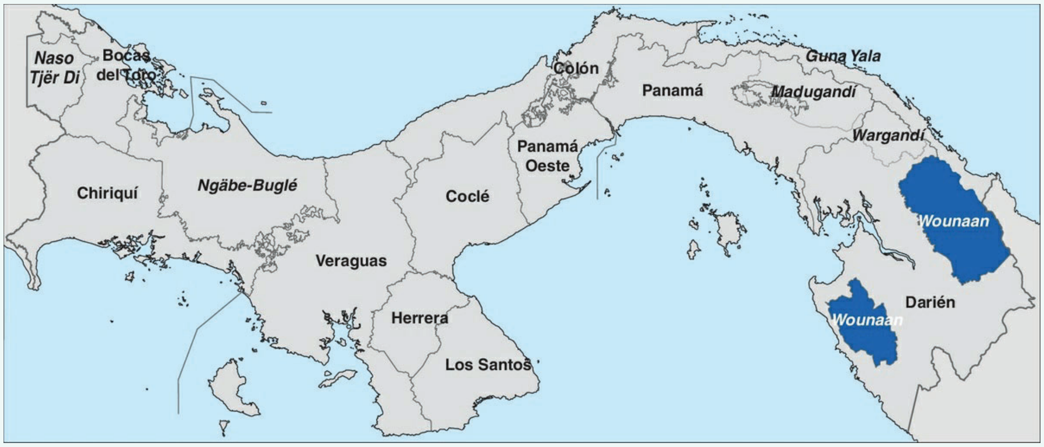
The ledger drawings were made only by men, and at first, they served mainly to record the lost lifeways of warfare, hunting, and tribal identity. At the turn of the 19th century, Native Americans were already using drawings on skin shirts, robes, and teepee covers to record personal histories. By the 1860s, these drawings had become more elaborate and more carefully composed. The original material of war deeds had expanded to include social customs and communal history. Ledger drawings flourished from the 1870s to the 1920s, during the early reservation period, a time of profound trauma and cultural change. They serve as both expressions of art and documents recording historic events.

ART AND EXPRESSING IDENTITIES

One key aspect of art in all cultures is how it is used to express both individual and cultural identity.

Ethnography

A Picture Book for Indigenous Kids


Naso Tjër Di
Bocas del Toro
Colón
Guna Yala
Panamá
Madugandí
Wargandí
Panamá Oeste
Chiriquí
Ngäbe-Buglé
Coclé
Wounaan
Veraguas
Darién
Herrera
Wounaan
Los Santos

Map 14.1 Location of the Wounaan in Panama.

The Wounaan are indigenous people of eastern Panama. They live in Darien province, an area about the size of Jamaica. Darien is a spectacular landscape of towering mountains, lowland rainforest, and dramatic Pacific and Caribbean coastlines. The location and varied geography of Darien makes it one of the richest and most biologically diverse places in the world. It is home to more than 600 bird species and more than 160 mammals. The Wounaan are members of a highly egalitarian society. They live in small villages along streams and rivers. They carve canoes they use to navigate green mazes of rainforest rivers and mangrove channels. They maintain diverse gardens around their houses, gather wild fruits and medicines, and plant bananas, plantains, corn, and root crops in small forest clearings.

The Wounaan are very close observers of nature and understand themselves as having a strong relationship with the animals around them. Their connections with birds are particularly important. The Wounaan understand birds as being able to grant certain powers to humans and as carrying important omens and messages about future events. Because their behavior is considered beautiful, birds have prominent roles in Wounaan dance. However, birds are also important to the Wounaan economy. Darien Province is one of the most important places on the migration route of many bird species. Birders come from all over the world to see the many species that are extremely rare elsewhere in the world. For this reason, learning about birds is particularly important.

Like many indigenous people, the Wounaan are also under fierce pressure from the world outside their communities. Non-Wounaan people encroach on their land, cutting and selling valuable hardwood trees and destroying the jungle ecosystem. Cultural influences from urban Panama threaten their cultural survival. Wounaan elders are deeply concerned about maintaining their language and their culture. They want to make sure that children growing up in their communities are taught their own culture. In particular, Wounaan elders want their children to understand the conviviality of the human and animal worlds, a word that indicates friendship, living together, and mutually reinforcing relationships.

One of the ways that the Wounaan National Congress (CNPW), along with its sister organization the Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People (FUNDEPW), hopes to maintain its cultural heritage is by publishing reading material for children in Wounaan. Very little has been published in the Wounaan language. Almost all Wounaan publications thus far have been created by Christian missionary societies wishing to convert the Wounaan. In 2017, the council received a grant from the United Nations to publish their own books in Wounaan. They wanted children to see books with children who looked like they did, spoke their language, lived in their environment, and did things that connected with their lives.

They contacted Julie Valásquez Runk, an anthropologist who had worked with the Wounaan since the mid-1990s and had been involved with several other publishing projects. The members of the CNPW and Runk established the Wounaan Cultural Team to undertake the project. Team members included Chenier Carpio Opúa, Doris Cheucarame Membache, hapk∧∧n Rito Ismare Peña, Dorindo Mémbora Peña, Chindio Peña Ismare, and Julie Valásquez Runk.

Figure 14.8 Julie Velásquez Runk and the members of the Wounaan Cultural Team.

Image provided by Julie Velásquez Runk

One of the first things that Runk found was that, since the Wounaan had never produced this kind of book before, they didn't know how to move from trying to explain their culture to outsiders to presenting a story that would be meaningful to children. Runk and the members of the CNPW were determined to tell the story of the activities of two children during a single day. Runk points out that, especially in the past decade, members of indigenous communities in Panama have been under extensive pressure to become more Latino/a. Part of her role was to encourage the storytellers to be more Wounaan, to tell a story in a way that would really be for Wounaan children rather than outsiders.

The story that they created together follows the adventures of a young girl and her brother. The children travel by themselves in a canoe, meet and play with other children, visit a relative's house where there is a newborn child, listen to birds and understand how they transmit omens, harvest corn, learn about conserving birds and their land, see women dancing a vulture dance, bathe in a river, share a meal, and listen to a tale told by their grandfather. In each scene of the book, they encounter birds and learn something about what they mean to their community and how to live with them.

Each scene in the book is illustrated with a watercolor image showing the children, their activities, and the birds they encounter. From the beginning of the project, Runk and the CNPW understood that illustrations were a critical aspect of the work. They hoped to recruit a Wounaan artist to produce the pictures for the project, but although the Wounaan are well known for art such as basketry and carving, there are very few Wounaan artists who create the kinds of pictures that the book needed, and none were available. Runk and her colleagues recruited then student Frankie Grin to produce the drawings. Grin, Runk, and the CNPW worked together intensely to make the drawings true to the shapes, colors, and textures of Wounaan life. Each drawing went through numerous revisions and the Wounaan elders worked with Grin to show their vision of daily experience in their villages.

Runk and the CNPW began to develop the project in 2019 and hoped to be able to produce the book rapidly. However, as the COVID-19 epidemic struck, the book was delayed, and the process of writing had to change. Runk had been accustomed to working in Panama in very close contact with the CNPW members, but now everything had to be done through phone calls and conferencing services. Far worse, the pandemic deeply impacted the Wounaan community. Rito Ismare Peña, one of the key collaborators on the project, died of the disease. He was a charismatic Wounaan leader, story teller, and one of a small number of traditional flute players. His death made it difficult to continue, but other Wounaan stepped in to help the project. The final book includes a beautiful picture of him playing the flute accompanied by his son playing a drum.

Despite delays and deaths, the final book, authored by the Wounaan Cultural Team and with illustrations by Frankie Grin, appeared in the fall of 2021. The book, called *An Adventure of Wounaan Children and Many Birds*, was made available in three languages: Wounaan, Spanish, and English. There are printed versions of it available in Panama. However, in Panama, the book is also available free in a digital version that can be viewed on smartphones (which many Wounaan now have). In addition to the printed version, the Cultural Team also produced a recorded version in the three languages, read by the Wounaan authors in Wounaan and Spanish, and in English by Liz Lapovsky Kennedy, an anthropologist who worked with the Wounaan in the 1960s.

You can see the book at https://www.storyjumper.com/book/read/116970692/An-Adventure-of-Wounaan-Children-and-Many-Birds, and you can purchase it at a very low price if you would like. All profits from the sale of the book go to the Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People.

Body Art and Cultural Identity

For thousands of years, people all over the world have been marking and adorning their bodies. Members of almost all cultures alter their bodies. Circumcision and other genital operations, scarification, piercing, and tattooing are common throughout the world. These body modifications are used to announce identification with particular groups and to display social position. Tattooing, scarification, and genital operations are ways of permanently engraving group membership on the body (Figure 14.9). Applying tattoos or facial scars marks one as a member of a group in a visible way that cannot be easily denied. Such body changes may denote elements of particular status as well as membership. For example, body marking has been used in Western Europe since ancient times. Tattoos, cutting, and painting have been used to mark outlaws, members of the nobility, soldiers, slaves, and members of religious orders (Schildkrout, 2004). In his study of tattooing in Polynesia, Alfred Gell (1993) demonstrated that tattooing both created and reinforced status hierarchy. For Polynesians, tattoos were critical elements in the relationship between humans and the sacred.

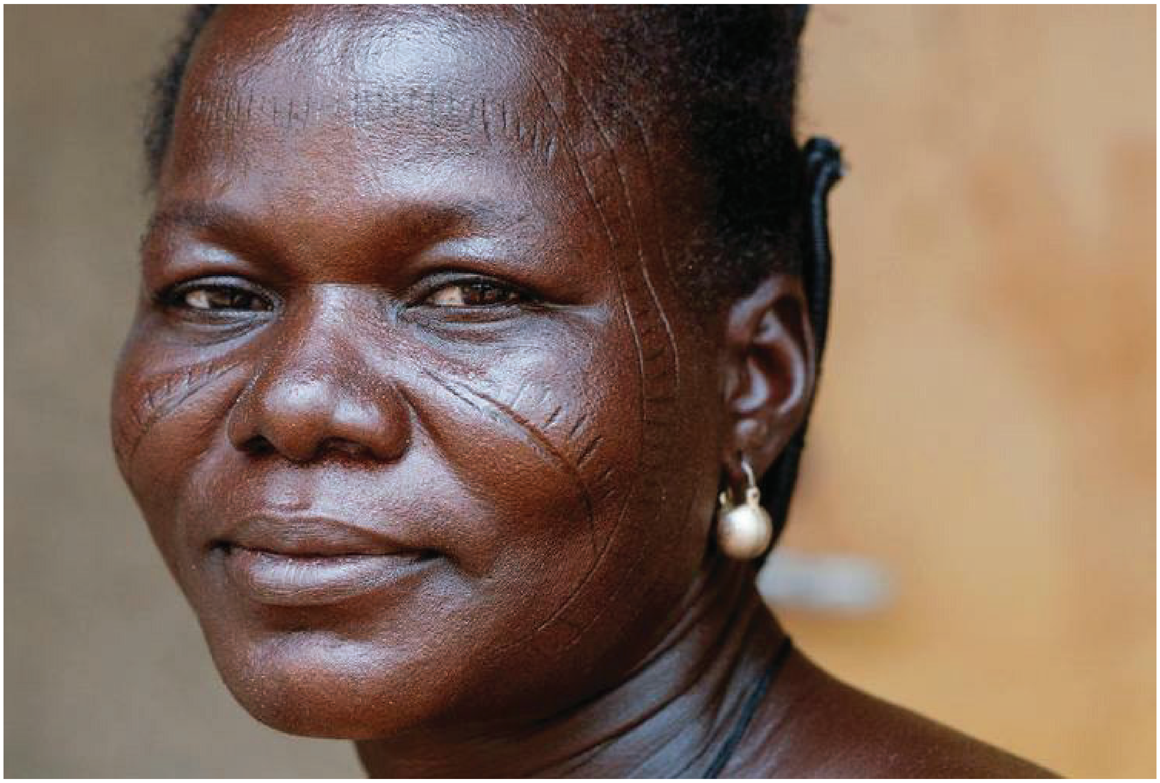


Figure 14.9 Scarification is a way of permanently engraving group membership on the body. This woman’s facial scars identify her as a member of the Mossi ethnic group of Burkina Faso, West Africa.

Joerg Boethling/Alamy Stock Photo

In many cultures, body art is associated with enhancing beauty and thus is related to gender. In India and the Middle East, henna, an orange-red dye made from the leaves of a small shrub, is used to dye fingernails and parts of the hands and feet to enhance a woman’s beauty, especially on ceremonial occasions such as religious holidays or marriage. In Morocco, where Maria Messina (1988) studied the body art of henna application, girls are first decorated with henna at age 3 or 4 in preparation for the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. However, the cultural importance of henna is primarily related to marriage. The “night of henna” occurs on the first night of the 3-day marriage celebration. Women are also decorated with henna toward the end of their pregnancies. The month of Muharram, which marks the Muslim New Year, is another occasion for decorating married women with henna.

Henna parties—events at which women are decorated with henna—are also viewed as a way of preventing illness or misfortune by placating malevolent spirits called jinn. Sometimes women hire specialists to apply henna designs, but the application may also be done by a family member. Although specific designs are traditional in certain regions, henna specialists also innovate in styles, and designs change according to the occasion. In addition to the cosmetic function of henna and the prevention of illness, henna parties are celebrations during which friends visit, and singing and dancing may take place. They also provide occasions where women are the center of attention.

The application of henna designs has spread from its original home (probably in India) and is now common in the United States, where it acts less as a display of a group identity than as an expression of an individual taste and choice.

Art and Personal Identity

There is probably some sense in which all art involves the identity of the artist. However, it is good to understand that in most places and at most times, artists do not intend the objects they make to represent the artist’s personality, psychology, or identity. Most consumers of art are likewise uninterested in art as an expression of the artist’s identity. For example, when the members of Amsterdam’s civic guard commissioned *The Night Watch* from Rembrandt van Rijn in the 1630s, they did not do so because they hoped Rembrandt would use the painting to express his personal identity. They wanted Rembrandt to use his technical skill to produce a masterful portrait of themselves. They originally called the painting “Militia Company of District II under the command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocqu.” *The Night Watch* has become one of the world’s most famous paintings. Today we forget the identity of the people it depicts and prize it for Rembrandt’s then radical artistic vision and the perfection of its execution.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, it has become common to think of some art as the intentional expression of the artist’s identity and prize it for that reason. This trend probably started in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th^{h} centuries but has since spread to cultures around the world. Sometimes such work is deeply abstract, but when it is not, it often connects with and reflects deep cultural themes. Frida Kahlo and Fritz Scholder are two artists whose work is deeply personal but also deals with identity in ways that many contemporary people can relate to.

Frida Kahlo

The work of Frida Kahlo (1907–1954), a 20th-century Mexican painter, also illustrates how art combines elements of an artist’s personality, life experiences, political ideology, and national identity. Kahlo was born to an ethnically mixed middle-class family. Her father was a German Jew and her mother half Mexican and half Native American. In her childhood, she contracted polio, and a subsequent bus accident left her right leg deformed and her body in great pain. Her marriage to the great Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) was filled with conflict, and her attempts to have a child ended in a miscarriage. All of these cultural and personal issues are reflected in her painting, the subjects of which deal with illness and health, female sexuality and gender identity, marginality, cultural identity, power, and pain.

Kahlo was profoundly influenced by the Mexican Revolution. Although she was born in 1907, she claimed she was born in 1910, the year of the revolution, to demonstrate her identification with the poor and the peasants, in whose name the revolution was carried out. The revolution ushered in a time of political freedom that led to a new pride in Mexico. This fostered the awareness of indigenous, pre-Columbian, Mexican art, craft, and native traditions among European-influenced painters such as Kahlo and Rivera.

Kahlo drew on many elements of Mexican culture, such as *retablos* (votive paintings of Christian saints and martyrs); the Mexican folklore image of *La Llorona*, the archetypical, sexually voracious predator and evil woman who stands in contrast to the saintly wife and mother; and the indigenous Mexican Tehuana costume, with its embroidered skirts and blouses. Kahlo frequently wore this type of dress to demonstrate the cultural independence of Mexico. The dress had the added benefit of hiding her deformed leg. Kahlo’s self-portraits evidenced dualistic principles, like contrasts of dark and light and night and day, which referenced pre-Columbian myth. Kahlo’s paintings also examined the imbalance of power between Mexico and the United States, and the images of her broken body reflect the shattered dreams of the Mexican Revolution (Pierre, 2019; Wilcox, 2018).

Kahlo had exhibitions in New York City and in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s. However, much of her fame is recent. Since the 1990s, she has become an international cult. There is even a Frida Kahlo Barbie® doll (although it is the subject of a copyright dispute). Kahlo’s art particularly speaks to women, especially women’s experiences of physical pain, childbirth, and the emotional pain of love, which is symbolized by the many broken hearts in her self-portraits (Figure 14.10).

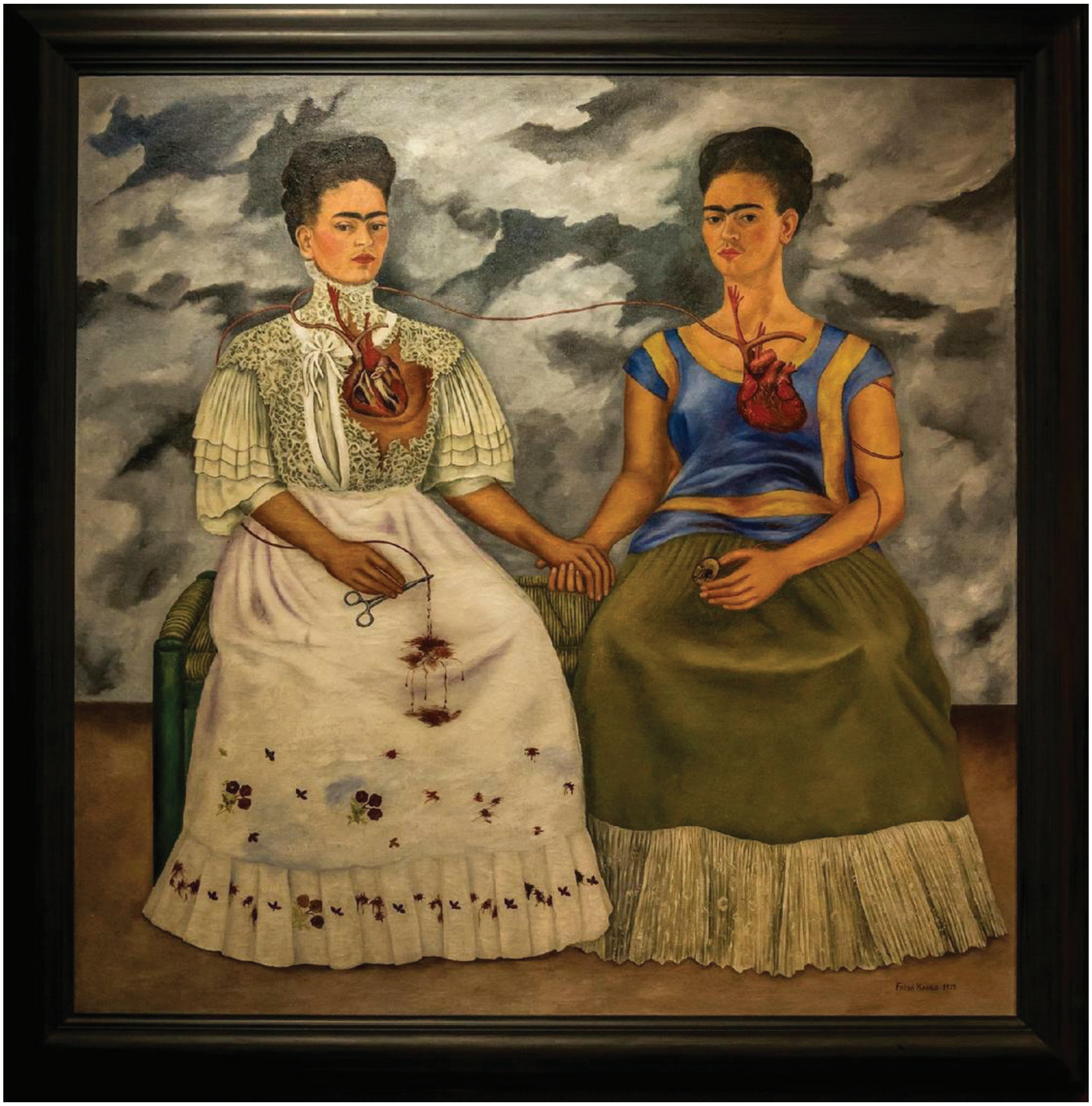


Figure 14.10 The work of artist Frida Kahlo combined personal and cultural themes. In *The Two Fridas*, painted in 1939, a traditionally dressed Frida is seated next to a Frida in a modern dress of her era. A blood vessel connects the open hearts of the two Fridas, but another is severed and lies bleeding in the lap of the traditionally dressed Frida.

Bjanka Kadic/Alamy Stock Photo

In Kahlo’s art, we see the important role of art in expressing the many strands—cultural, political, physical, and familial—that make up an artist’s personal identity, strands that, through their expression in art, speak to a world wider than the artist’s own.

Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian

Fritz Scholder (1937–2005) was another interesting and controversial artist who explored his identity through his paintings, particularly his *Indian/Not Indian* works. Scholder’s father was half Native American and half German. Although Scholder enrolled in his father’s tribe (the Luiseño), he often said he was not Indian.

Until Scholder’s work in the 1960s, most American Indian paintings, by both Native and non-Native artists, romanticized Indian life and the natural world and reflected popular clichés about the lives of Native peoples. In contrast, Scholder’s works, which combined historical images with abstract expressionism and pop art, presented a provocative challenge to these clichés. He directly addressed some uncomfortable truths about contemporary Native American life, such as alcoholism, poverty, and injustice. Scholder’s 1969 painting *Indian With Beer Can* generated outraged responses from both Native and non-Native viewers because it broke the taboo on talking about the ways that alcoholism devastated so many Indian lives. Another of his powerful and controversial paintings, 1971’s *Super Indian No. 2*, shows a Buffalo Dancer with an ice cream cone. Whereas many viewers found this image disrespectful, for Scholder, it cast a realistic look at the contact between the traditional and the modern in contemporary Native life.

Scholder’s ambivalence about his Indian identity, reflected in his art and in his frequent statements that he was not Indian, led other Native artists to criticize what they saw as his denial of the very source of his artistic success. Scholder’s powerful art, recently exhibited at the National Museum of the American Indian, illustrates both his own shifting identities and new perspectives on his culture and how the two are intertwined (Ringlero, 2008).

ART AND REPRESENTING THE OTHER

So far in this chapter, we have discussed some of the important aspects of art as they relate to cultural and individual identities. But in representing cultural identities, art depicts not only the “we”—that is, the cultural in-group—but also the “other”—the alien, the foreigner, the outsider. Artistic forms are important aspects of cultural ideologies of difference, communicating in sometimes subtle but significant ways the nature of we–they distinctions.

The rendering of the other appears in art all over the world. Artistic products often not only show their subjects but also provide insight into the mind-set of the artist and their culture. Artistic images of outsiders may be useful as historical documents, providing details of the behavior and dress. However, this art may also reflect the fears and fantasies one group of people entertains about another (Bassani & Fagg, 1988).

Orientalism in European Art

One result of the encounters between Europeans and other peoples was a profound rethinking of European cultural identity. Although these encounters were experienced differently in different times and places, Europeans most often responded by creating opposite categories of “them” and “us” (Bitterli, 1986). This dichotomy took many forms: East and West, primitive (or barbarian) and civilized, traditional and modern, developed and undeveloped. As we note in the “Anthropology Makes a Difference” section, the differences in museum exhibits of Western and non-Western art implicitly distinguished between the “civilized” us of the West and the non-Western “primitive” other.

In the 19th century, Europeans explored, colonized, and then wrote about and painted North Africa, Arabia, the Levant, and parts of the Ottoman Empire. This region, today called the Middle East, was then called the Orient. European artists of the 19th and 20th centuries offered armchair travelers a vividly graphic image of the Islamic, largely Arabic, cultures inhabiting this world. One important impetus for these representations, particularly in France, was the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt (1798–1799). By the mid-19th century, the Egyptian experience had become part of the French cultural spirit and was found in a wide range of artistic representations in a style called **Orientalism** (Hauptman, 1985, p. 48).

Europeans saw the Orient as “other” in both positive and negative senses. They thought of their own society as democratic, dynamic, and rational but viewed the Orient as despotic, static, and irrational. However, the Orient was also enchanting: a land of mystery, fairy tales, and exotic beauty. This perception of the Orient was reflected in and reinforced by European paintings that emphasized the exoticism and glamour of markets, caravans, mosques, and private domestic places, all portrayed in lavish, opulent detail. Although many Europeans traveled to the Orient, painters generally worked from secondhand sources or, in some cases, purely from imagination. However, the exquisite detail of their work gave viewers a sense of historical accuracy.

Gender roles and relationships were a central theme in Orientalist painting. Men were shown as dominant and pictured in public places where women were mostly absent. The Arab warrior was the most common symbol of Oriental masculinity, but men were also painted in more relaxed poses, drinking coffee or smoking hookah. Oriental women were central to European fantasies of the period (Thornton, 1994). The difficulty of finding women to pose in no way inhibited their depiction. Indeed, this gave free rein to artists’ imaginations. Women were portrayed as the Orient’s greatest temptation, whether hidden behind the veil or revealed in the harem (Figure 14.11).

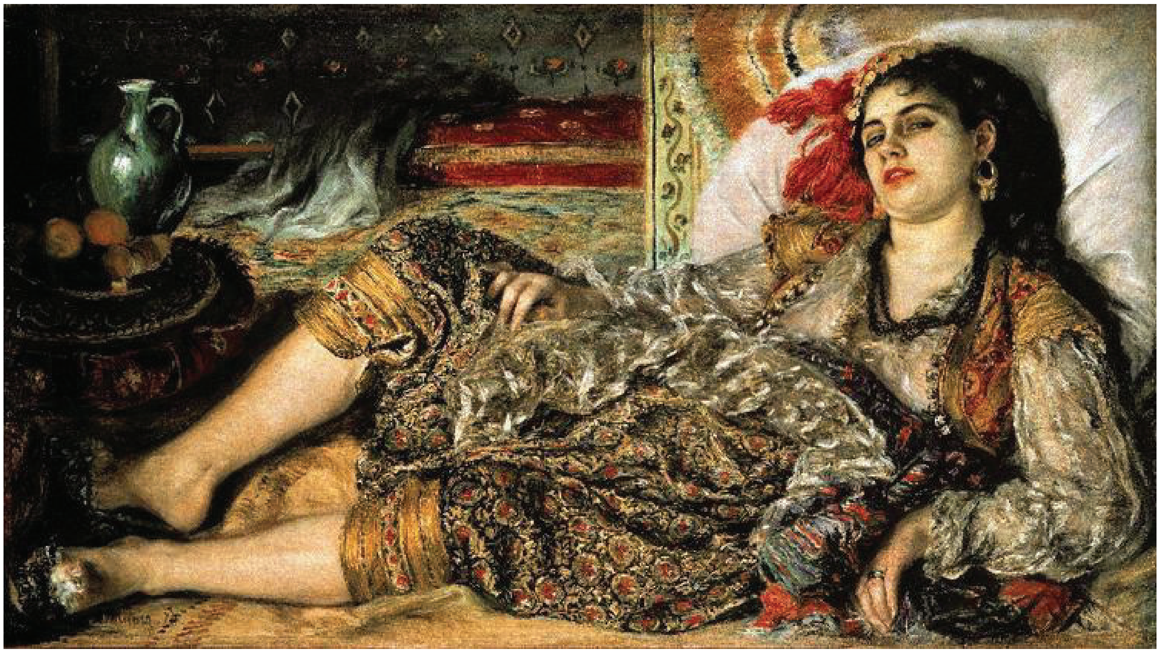


Figure 14.11 Orientalist paintings by European artists portrayed a glamorous, exotic, and sensual world. *Odalisque*, an 1870 work by French Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir, shows an Algerian woman reclining in a harem.

Art Images via Getty Images

Harems and slave markets, painted for male patrons by male artists, offered a convenient way of feeding European lust by displaying the dominant men and vulnerable women of another culture, far removed from home. The scenes depicted were often sensual and sometimes relatively sexually explicit for their era (Thubron, 2009).

These images were not confined to fine art but found frequent expression in other elements of culture, such as the picture postcard, a genre that the Algerian poet and critic Malek Alloula (1986) called the “comic strip of colonial morality.” In the case of Algeria, such postcards were produced for the French audience. Native models were photographed in studios engaged in exotic rituals in costumes the photographers provided. The models represented the French fantasy of the inaccessible Oriental female, more tempting because she was behind the veil in the forbidden harem. Alloula (1986, p. 122) connected Orientalist fantasies to colonial reality, noting that the raiding of women has always been the dream and the obsession of the total victor: “These raided bodies are the spoils of victory, the warrior’s reward.” The postcards are an “enterprise in seduction directed to the troops, the leering wink in the encampment” (Alloula, 1986, p. 122).

Orientalist representations of women also reflected the longstanding conflict between Christian Europeans and Middle Eastern Muslims. Ever since the Middle Ages, Europeans had criticized Muslims for their practice of polygyny, which Europeans associated with promiscuity. Thus, popular images of slave girls, harems, and concubines provided a continual source of horror and titillation for Western critics of the Muslim world. Even today, much Western thinking about the contemporary Middle East is concerned with the veiling, segregation, and oppression of women.

Orientalist art exploited what Europeans thought of as the exotic Middle East, by focusing on its sensual aspects. However, it is good to keep in mind that the line between sex and art is often thin. Erotic art painted 2,000 years ago can be found on the walls of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum (Stanska, 2022). In Paris in the 19th and 20th centuries, in addition to postcards and images of the sensualized Orient, there were also many sensual images of European women. Pornographic plays, novels, and images were common in France from at least the 17th century onward (Darnton, 2018, Senelick, 2008). European paintings such as Edouard Manet’s 1863 well-known work *Le Dejeuner Sur l’herb*, which shows two fully clothed European men with two fully unclothed European women, was contemporaneous with much Orientalist painting. It is perhaps unsurprising that European fascination with the erotic and sensual long predates its interest in the Middle East.

WORLD ART: CULTURE, MARKETING,

AND TOURISM

Today, the diffusion of the art of indigenous peoples has become a global industry. For tourists, the art of traditional and authentic indigenous peoples reflects deep and unchanging aspects of their cultures, and purchasing this art is an important part of the tourist experience. However, traditional art changes under the impact of globalization, the emergence of art markets, and the expansion of tourism. Ritually and socially significant creative expressions in indigenous societies are transformed as they become part of the global market.

Anthropologists are particularly interested in examining how art becomes functionally and stylistically reconceptualized to meet global demand and how this traffic in culture affects both the art and the cultural identities of the people who create it (Cotter, 2012). In addition to providing new sources of income, objects and performances that originated in traditional indigenous rituals and social life become artistic products around which modern cultural identities are constructed, both by outsiders and by members of the societies themselves. As a result of this global context, anthropologists and art historians now speak of **world art**, in which the arts of indigenous peoples are increasingly circulated and the role of the artist is no longer anonymous but increasingly known, as is typical in Western society. Previously, even when an individual artist could be tracked down, dealers and collectors were generally not interested in doing so. Anonymity was often exploited by art middlemen who learned that objects were worth more to buyers from Europe and the United States if they were portrayed as coming from unknown, preferably long-deceased artists in remote villages. The middlemen are quite willing to manipulate both the art objects and the information about their production to meet these demands (Steiner, 1995, p. 157). Today, however, this is changing, and the identification of native artists has now become an important factor in both understanding and marketing their arts.

Maria Martinez and Pueblo Pottery

The importance of the artist in some native North American societies contrasted with the more general emphasis on the anonymous artist in indigenous societies. The interest of nonnative art dealers in developing and marketing indigenous arts in the United States helped create the status of artist where it did not previously exist. One of the best-known examples is found in the life and work of the renowned potter Maria Martinez (1887–1980) of the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico (Babcock, 1995; Figure 14.12).

Figure 14.12 In the mid-20th century, Maria Martinez became the best-known Native American artist. Here, Martinez (far left) poses with her daughter and granddaughter (all holding her signature black-on-black pottery) in a 1976 publicity photo.

Bob Kreisel/Alamy Stock Photo

In 1908 and 1909, Edgar Lee Hewett, an archaeologist and the director of the Museum of New Mexico, conducted excavations near San Ildefonso. Hewett asked Martinez to make pottery modeled on the ancient designs he discovered in the excavations. Martinez and her husband Julian refined and elaborated their techniques and designs, producing a style of pottery that was black and could be produced with either glossy or matte finishes. Maria and Julian took an active interest in popularizing and promoting their work to a wide audience, and they demonstrated their pottery at the 1914 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego and the 1934 Chicago World’s Fair. At the same time, an extremely important art colony was growing around Santa Fe and Taos in northern New Mexico. Artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe, Ansel Adams, Dorothy Brett, and numerous others came to work and live in the area. This greatly raised interest in the art of the Southwest among collectors in the United States and Europe. After Julian’s death in 1943, Maria began to work with younger family members, including her daughter-in-law Santana and her son Popovi Da (1922–1971, born Antonio Jose Martinez). Popovi Da was a talented artist but also a talented promoter. He was a member of the New Mexico Arts Commission and the School of American Research Board of Managers.

The success of Maria Martinez and San Ildefonso pottery is based on the convergence of many factors: first and foremost, the artistic talents of Maria and the rest of the Martinez family. However, the work and the art world connections of Edgar Lee Hewett, the willingness of the Martinez family to promote their work, the broader international interest in Southwest American art created by the Taos art colony, the marketing talents of Popovi Da and his son Tony Da (1940–2008), and the eagerness of the art world for “authentic” native arts all played important roles, as did events such as the World's Fair. The result of all these factors was that San Ildefonso as a community became identified with fine pottery, and Maria Martinez became a star of the art world. Her signed pottery now sells for thousands of dollars. Ironically, she became a romanticized image of the Native American woman potter because of her connections to the national and global art market.

Tourism and Art

The arts have always been important in marking cultural boundaries and constructing ethnic identities. This is particularly true for indigenous people in the contemporary world. The media and tourism now play important roles in this process. The linking of the arts to cultural identity is promoted by popular television shows about indigenous cultures, the worldwide sale of ethnic arts, traveling museum shows in which indigenous peoples are represented through their arts, the circulation of tribal arts among art collectors, and tourism.

Artistic objects and performances that have their origin in ritual and social life may become, through tourism, a core around which modern cultural identities are constructed, as well as an important source of income (Figure 14.13).

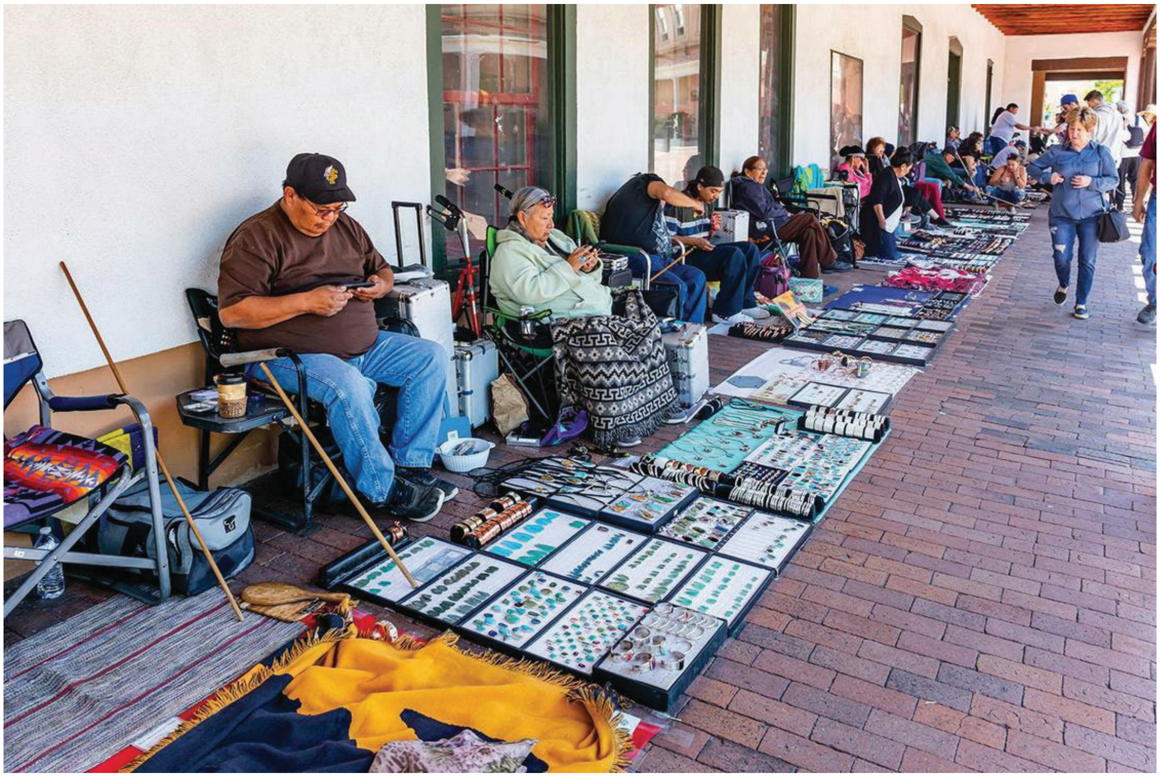


Figure 14.13 Many traditional arts have been given new life by the tourist industry. Here, tourists shop for Native American crafts and jewelry at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Rawf8/Alamy Stock Photo

Tourism can transform indigenous, culturally authentic, and creative art into mass-produced souvenirs and performances lacking any cultural meaning. On the other hand, it can also support and reaffirm cultural identities by reviving respect for traditional art forms. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive results.

In the American Southwest, the 20th century brought a resurgence of wide interest in Native American arts, and this has resulted in the production of a great deal of outstanding art in both traditional and new media. This interest continues today. Native artworks fetch high prices on the international market. But, as anyone who has traveled in the area knows, the Southwest is also awash with cheap bric-a-brac, often mass-produced in Asia.

In Bali, the interest of tourists in cultural performances has given such events an economic boost and allowed local troupes to buy new instruments for their musical ensembles and new costumes. It also has encouraged the opening of schools and institutes throughout Indonesia for training people in creating traditional art forms. An expert and professional group of Indonesian artists has maintained tight control over performances to conserve the quality of the arts. Similarly, interest in the Inuit arts has spurred sales to tourists and in the art market, providing an extremely important alternative source of income, especially as hunting declines. The connection between art, tourism, and the strengthening of cultural identity is also exemplified in the weavings created by Native American women in Guatemala and Mexico (Nash & Safa, 1986).

Ritually and socially significant cultural elements change meaning as they become part of staged performances for tourists or move from their original cultural contexts into the world art market. This is part of a larger process in which culture itself has become a marketable commodity, reshaped and packaged, in part, in response to the demands of globalization. Among the more recent anthropological interests in art are how the artworks of nonindustrial societies have become commodities in the process of globalization and how they have been reconceptualized functionally and stylistically to meet worldwide demand. It is still unclear whether this marketing of culture will move the world inevitably toward cultural homogenization or whether the global economy and the global village will always leave room for the emergence of meaningful local artistic expressions of cultural identity.

Tau tau, wooden effigies of nobles carved as part of mortuary rituals among the Toraja of Indonesia, provide an example of how indigenous arts and identities change under the impact of global tourism and commodification (Adams, 2006). Although the Toraja today are predominantly Christian, their rituals connected to the *tau tau* remain a major component of their cultural identity. Tourism has been essential in the maintenance of these traditional aspects of Toraja culture. Indeed, by the late 1960s, promoting tourist visits to the Toraja to view both *tau taus* and rituals became an important aspect of the Indonesian government's program to increase tourism and the flow of foreign money that comes with it (Volkman, 1984, p. 162).

The *tau tau* changed under the tourist gaze and the global art market. Traditionally, *tau taus* are relatively large carvings, commissioned by the families of the deceased. They represent the spirit of the deceased and are considered the vessel of the Torajan soul. When the mortuary rites are completed, the *tau tau* is placed with its relatives on platforms chiseled into limestone cliffs, where it becomes a visual link between the community of the living and the community of the dead (Figure 14.14).

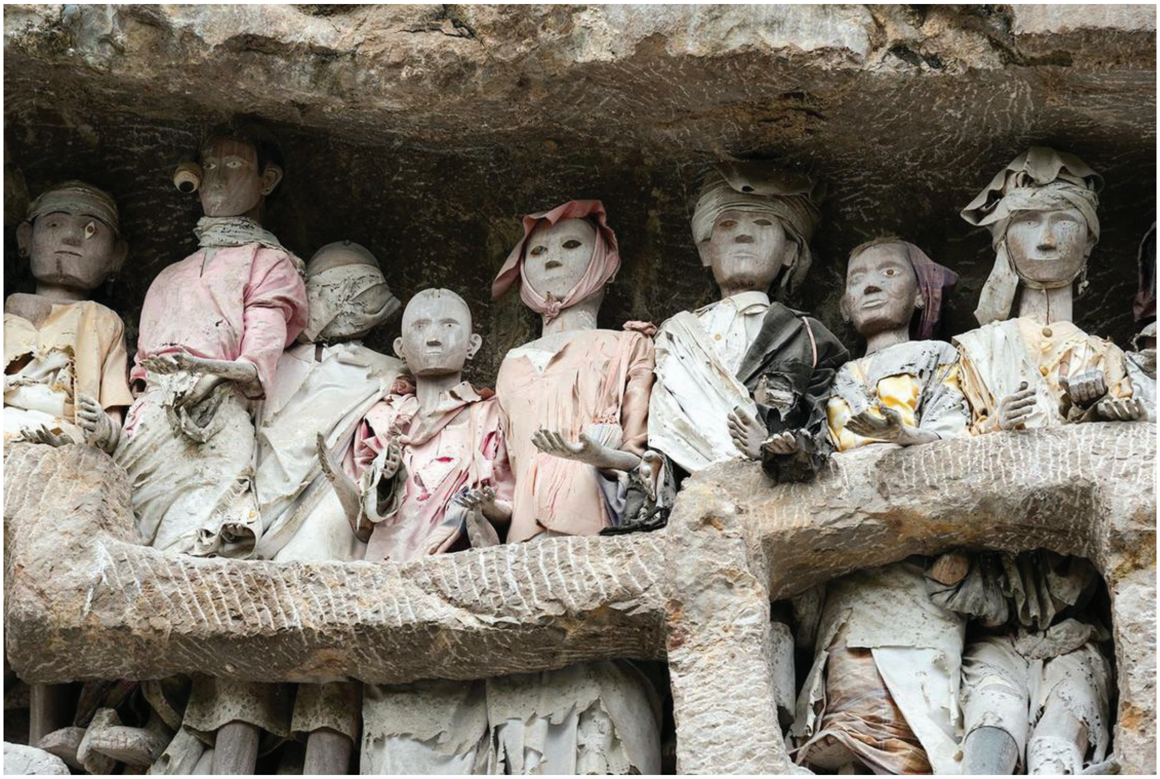


Figure 14.14 *Tau taus*, carved effigy figures of the deceased, are a marker of Torajan identity but are also valued by international art collectors. Modern miniature *tau taus* are popular tourist souvenirs. Shown here, the

tau taus of the royal family in Sangalla, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

iStockphoto.com/Elena Odareeva

Today, *tau taus* may incorporate modern cultural elements, such as digital watches, eyeglasses, modern clothing, bibles, and crosses. And while *tau taus* were traditionally carved only for the wealthiest nobility and were, therefore, a symbol of aristocratic status, today they have become symbolic of a generalized Torajan identity. *Tau taus* are now frequently created as tourist art. Miniature *tau taus* are sold in tourist markets, along with large carvings of the burial cliffs. Thus, tourism began a process that has changed the meaning of *tau taus* and partially transformed them from objects of religious significance to art objects of economic significance.

As traditional *tau taus* were transformed into artistic commodities in a global art market, hundreds of original older *tau taus* were sold to art collectors around the world, often under circumstances that obscured the legality of the sale. Redesignated by curators and collectors as archaic Indonesian art, some effigies have also found homes in museums. A stolen *tau tau* is irreplaceable. Its theft is tantamount to the abduction of an ancestor, and the loss must be redressed by ritual propitiation. However, legal, political, and economic obstacles stand in the way of repatriation, and *tau taus* today are openly sold for thousands of dollars in international galleries.

The Toraja realize that without the *tau taus*, tourism will decline, depriving them of an important source of income and prestige. The Indonesian government, more to maintain tourist interest than to address Torajan concerns, has replaced stolen *tau taus* with newly made ones, but the Torajans reject these not only as clumsily made but also as having no spiritual significance because they were not made under ritual conditions.

Paradox and pathos thus attend the *tau tau* today. Their meaning has changed from ritual object to art commodity. Whereas the *tau tau* once served as a protection for the family of the deceased, today the family of the deceased must protect the *tau tau*.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: ART AND CENSORSHIP

In 2001, the Taliban government of Afghanistan destroyed the 1,500-year-old Buddhas of Bamiyan, the largest Buddha sculptures in the world at the time. The Buddhas and nearby artworks had been the object of numerous earlier attacks, some dating back to the time of Genghis Kahn (Higuchi & Barnes, 1995). In 2012, rebel Islamic forces destroyed ancient tombs in the city of Timbuktu, and when forced from the city by French troops in 2013, they attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to burn manuscripts and artifacts they considered un-Islamic (Balter, 2013). And the satirical depictions of the prophet Muhammad in the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* resulted in terrorist attacks on January 7, 2015, by Islamist gunmen who forced their way into the magazine's office, killing 12 people. In 2017, ISIS destroyed parts of the ancient Roman site of Palmyra and numerous other ancient sites in Syria (Bilefsky, 2017).

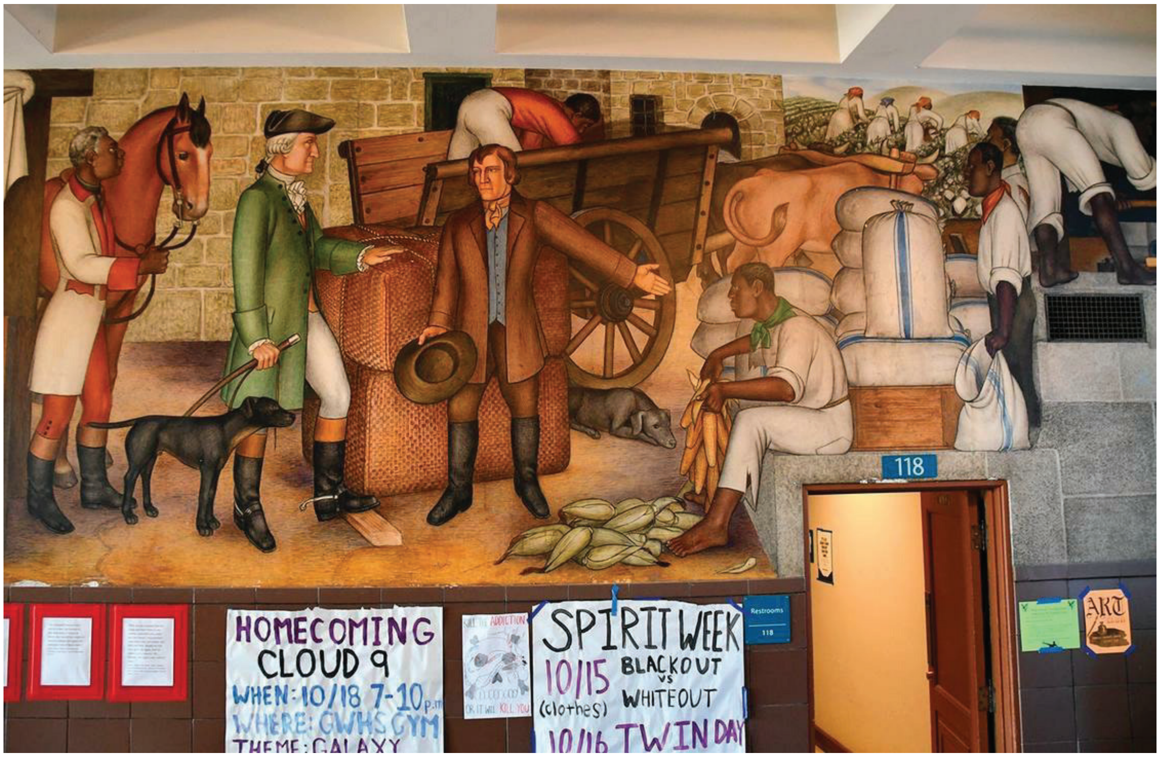
Freemuse, an organization that defends the rights of artists and monitors attacks on freedom of artistic expression, reported 978 violations of artistic freedom in 2020. These included the murders of 17 artists in 6 countries and the imprisonment of 82 in 20 countries. Freemuse also reported the damage or destruction of 93 artworks in 33 countries, including the United States (Freemuse, 2021).

In the United States, religious freedom and freedom of speech are both deeply held cultural values. Yet Americans also believe as Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (1841–1935) said, “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins” (Trachtman, 2009, p. 87). In an age of complexity, diversity, and instant global communication, someone’s nose seems always to be in the way.

This has been made clear by events and controversies over art in the United States. “This show is disgusting,” said New York City’s then-mayor Rudolph Giuliani, commenting on *Sensation*, a 1999 art exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. He was referring specifically to a painting called *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili, a British artist of Nigerian descent. The painting depicted a Black Madonna in a colorful flowing robe, dabbed with a clump of elephant dung and surrounded by images of women’s buttocks and genitals clipped from pornographic magazines (Steiner, 2002). The Giuliani administration attempted to cut the museum’s funding and evict it from its building unless it removed the offending works. They were prevented from doing so by a 1999 court decision in the case *Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences v. the City of New York and Rudolph W. Giuliani*, which argued that these actions violated freedom of speech.

In 2009, Sony released the video game *Hanuman: Boy Warrior*—to worldwide protest by Hindu groups (Hanuman, a Hindu deity, is a central figure in a Hindu epic). Rajan Zed, a Hindu activist, said that controlling Hanuman with a joystick was denigrating. “Lord Hanuman was not meant to be reduced to just a ‘character’ in a video game to solidify company/products base in the growing economy of India” (quoted in Tompson, 2009).

Politics is also challenging art depicting U.S. history. In 2019, the San Francisco Board of Education voted to conceal from public view, but not destroy, a series of murals that some people considered offensive to Native Americans and African Americans. The three murals were part of a series titled *The Life of Washington*, painted in the 1930s by Victor Arnautoff, a Russian émigré, who intended them as a criticism of America’s first president (Figure 14.15). One panel features Washington’s slaves picking cotton. A second panel shows a Native American with a scalp dangling from his waist, and a third panel shows a dead Native American at Washington’s feet. Those protesting the public showing of the murals, which they said told “history from the perspective of white people,” challenged other historians who called removing or hiding the murals “akin to book burning” (Pogash, 2019; Smith, 2019).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HOMECOMING
CLOUD 9
WHEN: 10/18 7-10 p.m.
WHERE: GWHS GYM
THEME: GALAXY
SPIRIT WEEK
10/15 BLACKOUT vs WHITEOUT
(clothes)
10/16 TWIN DAY
Restrooms
118
ART

Figure 14.15 At George Washington High School in San Francisco, murals from the 1930s by Victor Arnautoff created controversies in 2019 when the school board voted to conceal them because some considered them offensive.

Mikhail Turgiev/Sputnik via AP

The statue of President Theodore Roosevelt flanked by an African American on one side and a Native American on the other, outside the entrance to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, has similarly generated conflict. Many observers view the statue as displaying America’s legacy of colonialism and racial hierarchy, and some curators agree. The museum has addressed this issue by making the statue the center of an exhibition, *Addressing the Statue*, which incorporates a video and website depicting the statue’s history and examining President Roosevelt’s racism (Coleman, 2019). However, by the following summer, museum officials decided that this approach was not sufficient, and in June 2021, the New York City

Public Design Commission approved the removal of the statue, which was carried out in January 2022. As of summer 2022, the statue is in storage (Treisman, 2022).

You Decide

1. Have you experienced artistic portrayals of your own culture or identity that you find offensive? If so, do you think they should be censored?
2. If the majority in a community finds an artistic representation of their religion, race, or culture offensive, should it be censored?
3. Art offensive to religion, race, culture, or ethnicity has sometimes led to violence and death. Is the fear of violence a sufficient justification for artistic censorship?
4. In your opinion, should controversial art be removed, or should it be displayed as a means of educating the public?

SUMMARY

1. What is the core approach to an anthropology of art? For anthropologists, a key perspective on art is to examine it in its cultural and functional contexts. Anthropologists examine the wide range of activities and material products in which creative expression is guided by standards of beauty in a culture. They ask how these artistic products and performances function in ritual and social relationships.
2. What are some of the ways in which the arts of various cultures differ from each other? Cultures differ in the rules by which art is created, the importance of originality in art forms, the expected interactions of the artist with their audience, and the concept of art for art’s sake. In modern-day wealthy nations, the artist occupies a specialized status. In many societies, art production is not separated from other social activities but is embedded in crafts, economics, or rituals.
3. How is the power of art related to performance and emotion? In

some cases, the power of an artistic piece or performance is emotional because it draws upon cultural themes meaningful in a particular society. Sometimes, however, an artistic piece or performance itself may be regarded as inherently powerful. This may be the case when art is performed as part of a ritual—for example, when prehistoric hunters painted pictures of animals to achieve control over hunting.

4. What is the relationship between art and cultural themes? Art is always symbolic, and artistic creations most often have multiple levels of meaning and communicate different cultural themes. In Japan, one interpretation of some anime and manga is that these art forms display the repressed themes of Japanese militarism in World War II, the trauma caused by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the postwar dependence of the Japanese on the United States and resulting feelings of powerlessness.
5. What is deep play and how is it reflected in the Balinese cockfight? Deep play is the use of social activities to heighten emotions, display compelling aspects of social structure and culture, reinforce cultural identities, and allow people to viscerally experience (and perhaps think about) aspects of their own cultures. In Bali, the cockfight expresses the family, the village, and the social hierarchy. It helps people both experience and sometimes critique key themes of their society.
6. How is art used in support of social structure and power? Art often validates both the social order and the power of political leaders. Among the Inca, in ancient Rome, and in current-day societies, art was and is used in the service of power. But art can also challenge existing social and political structures by mocking those in power or questioning society’s rules. Art may also be used to record history and remember important past events, as illustrated by Native American ledger drawings.
7. What changes have taken place in the ways in which museums portray cultures? For more than 200 years, museums have made art and artifacts available to the public. Most early museums displayed art with little context. However, more recently, museums have increased their focus on the explanation of art

and collaboration with both individual artists and communities that produce art. In some cases, the return of items held by museums to the cultures that created them has been required by law. This has sometimes led to disputes over what can be displayed and how culture should be represented.

8. What are some of the connections between the arts and personal identities? Body art such as tattooing may identify group membership and status but can also be linked to cultural ideas of beauty and personal identity. Twentieth-century artists such as Frida Kahlo and Fritz Scholder used art to explore both their cultural and individual identities.
9. How does art express boundaries between the cultural in-group and the cultural "other?" Art can be used to express the cultural identity of an in-group and may also reinforce that identity by depicting the "other"—those felt to be different in basic ways from oneself. In Europe, Orientalism was an art style that represented both positive and negative European fantasies of the Middle East, particularly through paintings and photographs of women in Middle Eastern harems.
10. How has the market for art affected the artistic production of indigenous people? The international market has created a demand for the artistic production of indigenous people that has had both positive and negative effects on local arts. In some cases, both the identity and creativity of local artists have been suppressed in favor of stereotypical production. However, some native artists, such as Maria Martinez, have become internationally famous.
11. How does art become an important factor in cultural identity as people interact with others in a globalized context? Today, many indigenous societies, such as the Toraja of Indonesia, are known throughout the world because of their art forms. The global context for indigenous art includes collectors, museums, and, particularly, tourism. Tourism may have economic benefits, but it can also result in the transformation of art into staged displays and commodities.
12. What has been the effect of globalization on **world music**? Globalization has increased interest in the music of different

people. Musical groups from all over the world tour internationally. It has also spurred the development of styles such as **bhangra** that combine elements of many different musical traditions.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Art pervades almost every aspect of human social life. Give examples of art in the ways people make a living, in religion, in social structure, and in family life.
2. Some analysts make a distinction between art and craft (the application of aesthetic principles to the production of utilitarian objects). Discuss and debate whether or not this is a useful distinction.
3. In this chapter, we explored Balinese cockfighting and Spanish bullfighting as examples of deep play. We noted that in the United States, sports like football might be examples of deep play. However, not all cockfights in Bali or football games in the U.S. are deep. What makes an event deep? Give examples of events from your own experience and explain why they are, or are not deep
4. Are tourism and the global art market a benefit or a detriment to art? Propose several ways in which tourism and capitalism benefit artistic production and several ways in which they harm this same production.

Key Terms

anime (p. 401)

arts (p. 396)

bhangra (p. 422)

deep play (p. 403)

ledger drawings (p. 407)

manga (p. 401)

Orientalism (p. 414)

world art (p. 415)

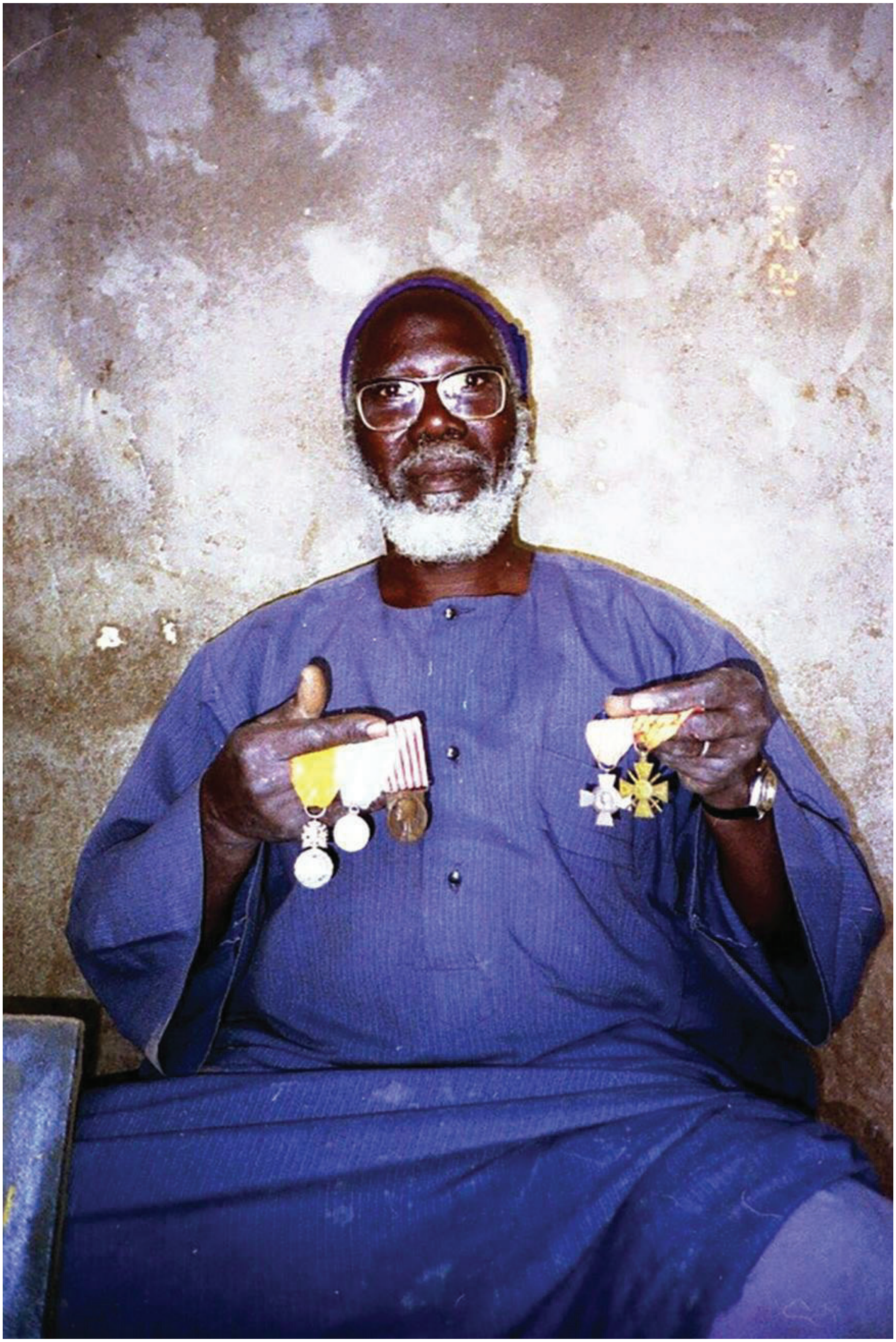
world music (p. 422)

Note

1. We should be skeptical of the claim that art is produced simply for its own sake. Consider MGM's famous Leo the Lion seal that reads "ars gratia artis," Latin for art for art's sake. Of course, MGM doesn't make art for art's sake, it makes movies, and is involved in many other enterprises for money's sake.

PART V CULTURE CHANGE

15 MAKING THE MODERN WORLD: CONQUEST, COLONIALISM, AND RESISTANCE



A Malian man holds medals that the French awarded to his father, a veteran of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais. The Tirailleurs Sénégalais was an army regiment the French drafted and recruited from their colonial possessions in West Africa between 1857 and 1960.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify some of the critical motives and methods for the European expansion of the 16th century.
2. Compare and contrast the era of colonization between 1500 and 1800 with colonizing in the 19th century.
3. Analyze the ways in which Europeans attempted to extract wealth from their colonies in the 19th and 20th centuries.
4. Discuss the reasons why almost all colonies had achieved independence by the end of the 1960s.
5. Evaluate the relationship between globalization and nationalism.

Even though we know things change, most of the time, most people tend to treat the world as static. We assume that the social arrangements we see today, the distribution of wealth and poverty and power and powerlessness, have great historical depth. If we think of history at all, we tend to think of the histories of individual nations. But thinking about the world this way fails to account for the broader picture of change and its truly revolutionary nature. Our world is the current result of far-reaching historic processes that involved the ebb and flow of wealth and power among different regions of the globe and the creation of the modern idea of both person and nation. These processes have had a particularly important impact on the kinds of small, seemingly isolated societies that anthropologists often study.

The pace of change over the past several centuries has been enormous. Consider that the earliest writing probably appeared about 5,500 years ago. The first movable-type printing press was invented in China about 1,000 years ago, and Gutenberg was the first European to use movable type in about 1440. The telegraph was invented in the 1830s, the telephone in the 1870s, and the radio in the early years of the 20th century. TV was first demonstrated in the 1920s but didn’t become common until the 1950s. The first communications satellite was launched in 1962 and the first web browser in 1990. Cell phones have become ubiquitous within the past 25 years. Google was founded in 1998, Skype in 2003, Facebook in 2004, Instagram in 2010, Tinder in 2012, and TikTok in 2016.

Although we are aware that the world has changed profoundly, we are mostly unaware of the patterns of change and their effects on cultures. The story of these patterns is complex and diverse. It is a story of contact between cultures stretching over hundreds of years and occurring in thousands of locations. Sometimes cultural contact was accidentally genocidal, sometimes intentionally so. Many traditional cultures were destroyed, but others prospered, albeit in altered forms. Members of different cultures often confronted each other through a veil of ignorance, suspicion, and accusations of savagery. But sometimes common interests, common enemies, mutual curiosity, and occasionally friendship overrode their differences.

In this chapter, we describe the overall pattern of change during the past several hundred years. In the broadest sense, this involved the incorporation of relatively separate cultures and economies into a vast and chaotic, yet integrated, world economic system. The formation of this system resulted in enormous inequality both within and among nations. Wealth and labor flowed from some areas of the world to others. These created the financial accumulation necessary for the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism. Empires rose and fell as powers competed for dominance within their borders and with each other. The Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire, Russia, and Japan played critical roles in the story. However, the expanding influence and power of western European states probably has had the greatest impact worldwide. For that reason, we begin with a bird’s-eye view of Europe and the rest of the world as it might have appeared in 1400.

As surprising as it may seem now, a visitor touring the world in 1400 on the eve of European expansion might well have been amused by the notion that European societies would soon become enormously wealthy and powerful. Other areas of the globe would have seemed like much more likely prospects. Europeans had devised oceangoing vessels, but Arab and Chinese ships regularly made much longer voyages. Compared to the cities of India and China, those of Europe looked like mere villages. Almost no European states could effectively administer more than a few hundred square kilometers. Certainly, there was nothing that could compare to China’s vast wealth and centralized bureaucracy. Europeans were masters of cathedral and castle construction, but other than that, their technology was backward. War, plague, and economic depression were the order of the day (Scammell, 1989). Moreover, other areas of the world seemed to be growing in wealth and power. Despite occasional setbacks, the Islamic powers had expanded steadily in the five centuries leading up to 1400, and Muslim societies stretched from Spain to Indonesia. Not only had these empires preserved the scholarship of India and the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, but they had also greatly improved on it, making important discoveries in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, zoology, mineralogy, and meteorology (Lapidus, 1988, pp. 96, 241–252; Figure 15.1).

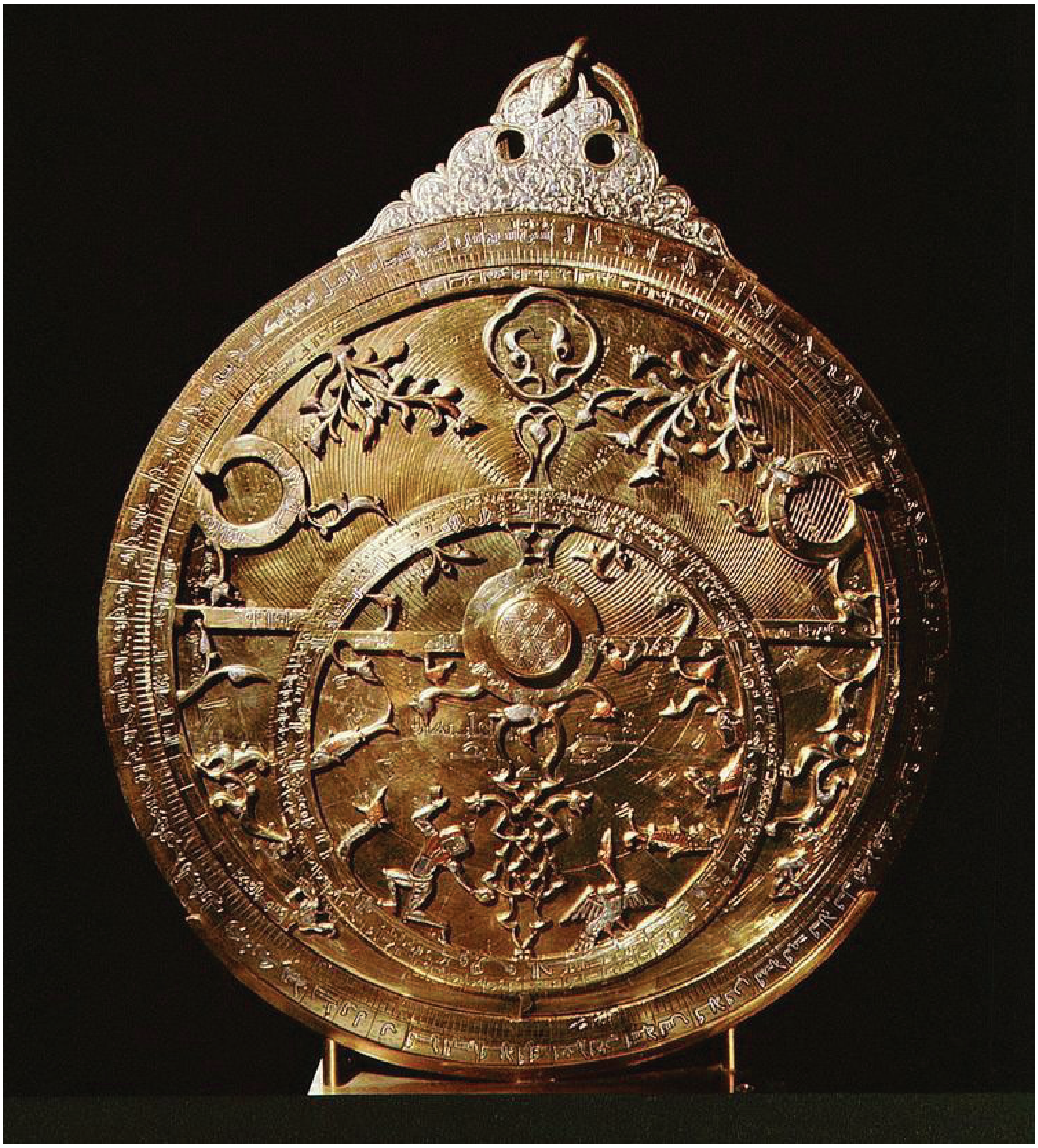


Figure 15.1 Medieval Islamic societies made important discoveries in the sciences. The astrolabe, an instrument used to solve problems relating to the specific positions of the sun and stars, was in use in the Islamic world by the 9th century, hundreds of years before it was used in Europe. This example is from Cairo in the late 13th century.

Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

China’s ancient civilization was extraordinarily powerful. As late as 1793, Emperor Ch’ien Lung, believing China to be the most powerful state in the world (or perhaps showing bravado in the face of a foreign threat), responded to a British delegation’s attempt to open trade by writing to King George II, “Our dynasty’s majestic virtue has penetrated into every country under heaven and kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things…. We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country’s manufacturers” (Peyrefitte, 1992, pp. 288–292). Unfortunately for the Chinese, by the time the emperor wrote this letter, advances in military technology and the Industrial Revolution were giving Europeans decisive advantages. Within a half-century, at the end of the First Opium War (1839–1842), Britain and other European powers virtually controlled China.

EUROPEAN EXPANSION: MOTIVES AND METHODS

In contrast to its slow beginnings in the 15th century, European power grew rapidly from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Many theories have been suggested to account for the causes and motives of European expansion. Although it was often a cover for more worldly aims, the desire of the pious to Christianize the world was certainly a motivating factor. The archives of the Jesuit order include more than 15,000 letters written between 1550 and 1771 from people who wanted to be missionaries (Scammell, 1989, p. 60). The desire to find wonders, both real and imagined, was also important. Europeans searched for the mythical kingdom of Prester John, a powerful but hidden Christian monarch; the fountain of youth; and the seven cities of Cibola.

Of course, there was always the desire for wealth as well. Nations and nobles quickly lost their aversion to exploration as gold and diamonds were discovered. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a chronicler of the Spanish conquest of the Americas and a swordsman under the command of Cortés, perhaps put it best: “We came here to serve God, and the King, and also to get rich” (Simmons, 1991, p. 40; Figure 15.2). The wealthy and powerful looked for easy trade routes to the wealth of Eastern empires such as China and Japan. The poor and oppressed of Europe saw opportunities for wealth and respect in the colonies. Once they arrived in the colonies, they sometimes fulfilled these dreams of wealth by re-creating the very social order they had fled.

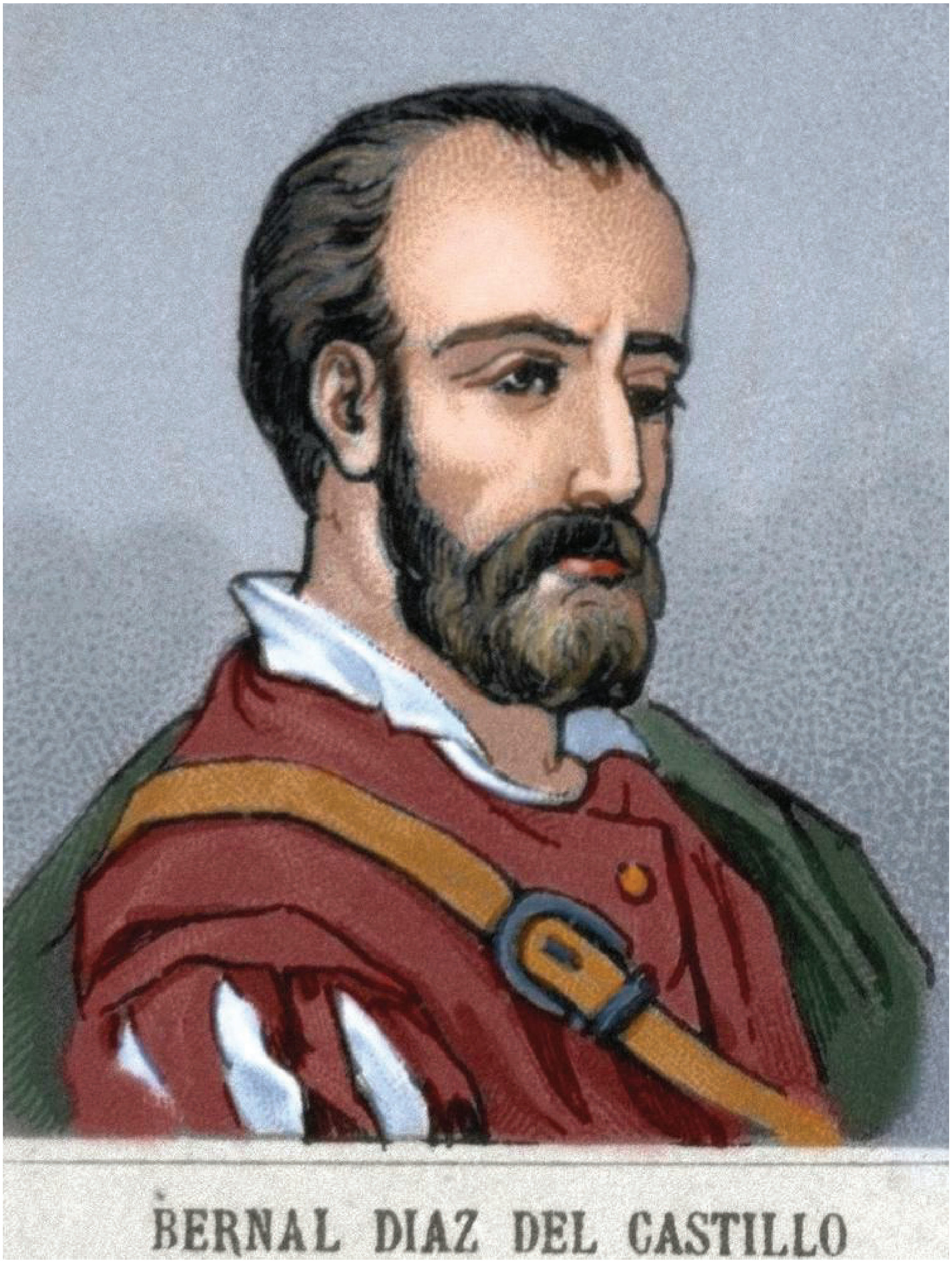

BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO

Figure 15.2 Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1490–1584) was a Spanish conquistador and a chronicler of the conquest of

Mexico. In *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, he wrote, “We came here to serve God, and the King, and also to get rich.”

Prisma/UIG/Getty Images

European expansion was helped by a series of social and technological developments. These included the rise of a banking and merchant class, a growing population, and the development of the caravel, a new ship that was better at sailing into the wind. Two other developments, the monoculture plantation and the joint stock company, also had critical impacts on the world.

In many cases, however, the key advantage Europeans had over other people was the diseases they carried. Almost every time Europeans met others who had been isolated from the European, African, and Asian landmasses, they brought death and cultural destruction in the form of microbes. In many instances, virtually the entire native population of a region perished of imported diseases within 20 years. Although Europeans also died of diseases, they did so in far smaller numbers (Karlen, 1995; Mann, 2005).

The European search for wealth depended on tactics that, in their basic form, were ancient. Two of the quickest ways to accumulate wealth are to steal it from others and to get other people to work for you for free. State societies have always practiced these methods. War, slavery, exploitation, and inequality were present in most of the world before European contact, so there was nothing fundamentally new about their use by Europeans. However, no earlier empire had been able to practice these tactics on a global scale. All previous empires, however large, were regional affairs. For the first time in history, European expansion linked the entire world into an economic system. For example, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the British consumed an average of 1.5 pounds of tea (grown almost entirely in India) and 11 pounds of sugar (mostly produced on Caribbean islands using African slave labor) per capita each year (Johnstone, 1976, p. 60; Mintz, 1985). Although these had previously been luxury products consumed only by the wealthy, falling prices made these commodities available to the vast majority of the British population. Thus, Britons of almost all social classes expressed the economic unification of the world in their daily patterns of consumption. The global economic system created by European trade and expansion linked regions of the world that were great distances from one another and created much of the wealth of Europe and North America. At the same time, it systematically impoverished much of the rest of the world.

Pillage

One of the most important means of wealth transfer was **pillage**, stripping an area of money, goods, or raw materials through the threat or use of physical violence. In the early years of expansion, Europeans were driven by the search for precious metals, particularly gold and silver. When they found such valuables, they moved quickly to seize them. Metals belonging to indigenous peoples were soon dispatched back to Europe, and mines were placed under European control. The profits of these enterprises were enormous. For example, in 1531, Francisco Pizarro captured the Inca emperor Atahuallpa and received a ransom of 6.5 tons of gold and almost 13 tons of silver (Orlove, 1985). Native smiths worked nine forges day and night to melt down this treasure, which was then shipped back to Spain (D. E. Duncan, 1995, p. 158). Of course, the payment of the ransom did not save Atahuallpa, who was executed by the Spanish in 1533. Between 1500 and 1660, Spanish colonies in the Americas exported 300 tons of gold and 25,000 tons of silver (Scammell, 1989, p. 133).[1]

Such looting was not limited to the New World. After the British East India Company came to power in India, it plundered the treasury of Bengal, sending wealth back to investors in England (Wolf, 1982, p. 244). In 1860, during the Second Opium War, the Summer Palace northwest of Beijing was looted by the British and French armies. The British commander collected the loot and immediately created a prize commission, which auctioned the loot on the field to the looters themselves. The £26,000 the auction realized was divided among the European officers and men, with first class field officers getting £60 each (Hevia, 2007, p. 131).

Art, artifacts, curiosities, and sometimes human bodies were stolen around the world and sent to museums and private collections in Europe and the United States. Some Europeans became known for the scale and daring of their plundering. Giovanni Belzoni, sometimes known as The Great Belzoni, plundered the seven-ton head of Ramesses from the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Ramesses II. The head was sent to the British Museum, where it remains today. Later, with the help of a battering ram, Belzoni plundered four tombs in the Valley of the Kings, including that of Seti I (Aufderheide, 2003, p. 520). Belzoni went on to great fame touring and exhibiting his “findings” in Europe. His work was widely followed in the United States, and a small town in Mississippi is named after him.

Anthropology Makes a Difference: Museums and Anthropology II

Who Owns History?

In February 2009, controversy broke out in the art world. Two Chinese bronzes depicting signs of the Chinese zodiac were being held in the collection of Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent. Despite the protests of the Chinese government, they were to be auctioned. Similar pieces had fetched very high prices in 2007, so multimillion-dollar bids were expected. The auction was won by a Chinese art dealer with a bid of about $40 million. However, the story took a strange turn when the dealer announced that he had no intention of paying the bid and demanded that the bronzes be voluntarily returned to China. He argued (correctly) that the bronzes that were taken when the Summer Palace was pillaged in 1860 and the loot auctioned were stolen property, part of China’s patrimony. At first, Bergé rejected the legal claims of the Chinese government but said that he would be glad to return the bronzes if the Chinese government “[gave] in return human rights, the liberation of Tibet, and a welcome for the Dalai Lama” (Eakin, 2009, p. 19). However, in 2013, with much ceremony, Francois-Henri Pinault, the chair of both the auction house and the corporate group that owns Saint Laurent, returned the bronzes to China. The Chinese government has demanded the return of all the objects looted from the Summer Palace. It has purchased some. It is also possible that the Chinese government and Chinese collectors are connected to a string of thefts of Summer Palace artifacts from European museums and private collections that began in 2010 (K. Meyer, 2015).

This incident highlights the persistent controversy over the ownership and possession of objects of historical and artistic value. Nations in which such objects were made have long attempted to claim ownership of them and demand their repatriation. The Elgin Marbles are one of the most famous examples. In the early 19th century, the British diplomat Thomas Bruce, the seventh earl of Elgin (and father of James Bruce, who ordered the looting of the Summer Palace), removed much of the Parthenon’s marble sculpture and, in 1816, sold it to the British government, which displayed it at the British Museum in London (Figure 15.3). Controversy erupted almost immediately, and the Greek government has repeatedly demanded the return of the marbles. In 2009, a spectacular new museum of the Acropolis opened adjacent to the site itself in Athens. The Acropolis Museum displays more than 4,000 objects from ancient Greece. It has a large area specifically designed to display the marbles, but there are only photographs there. The marbles themselves remain in London. In early 2023, secret talks between the Greek and British governments about the return of the marbles were widely reported. However, although sources reported that progress had been made, the return of the marbles was not imminent.

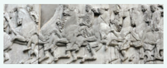


Figure 15.3 The Parthenon sculptures were removed to England in the early 19th century. Greece has been demanding their return for almost 200 years. One small section of the Parthenon frieze (the band of sculpture that surrounded the top of the building) is seen here. Lord Elgin acquired 274 linear feet of the frieze.

iStockphoto.com/oversnap

The issue of stolen material particularly affects indigenous people in the Americas and elsewhere. Although materials were sometimes purchased legally from tribal and other native peoples, in many cases, they were simply taken. This is particularly true of human remains. Museums and other institutions in the United States hold large collections of skeletal remains. The Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA), passed by the U.S. government in 1990, requires institutions that receive federal funding to return many objects, particularly bones, to the native groups from which they were taken. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, in 1990, U.S. museums and research institutions held almost 200,000 Native American remains and about 2.56 million associated funerary objects. By the end of 2020, about 83,000 human remains had been either returned to their communities or had their legal status settled in other ways, but almost 117,000 remained in collections. Rights to about 70% of the funerary objects have been settled, but the proper ownership of more than 750,000 objects remains to be determined (National Park Service, 2020). Repatriations of bones and artifacts have occurred in other nations as well. Katherine Lambert-Pennington (2007), for example, documents and analyzes the repatriation of Australian Aboriginal material and the role of these materials in constructing Aboriginal identity.

In addition to bones, museums have held many other objects considered sacred by their creators and former owners. Often, members of these groups object to the display of sacred objects, no matter how respectfully or highly contextualized. Some forms of knowledge and some objects are private.

Anthropologists have been heavily involved in helping to negotiate disputes between native peoples and museums, as well as in helping native communities recover privately held material (which is not covered by NAGPRA). For example, anthropologist Margaret Bruchac helped the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) prevent the sale of two wampum belts. The belts, considered both spiritually and politically important objects, had been taken in the early 20th century by non-Native collectors for the Museum of the American Indian and were among the 43,000 objects the museum sold to private collectors in the 1970s. Bruchac has also helped with the recovery of material from the collection of Yale University and other places (Bruchac, 2010, 2018), and Monica L. Udvardy played an important role in securing the return of statues stolen from Kenya and displayed at U.S. museums (Lacey, 2006).

The ownership and repatriation of historical objects are often controversial and raise both practical and philosophical questions. On the practical side, many claims of ownership are problematic. For example, much of the ancient Byzantine Empire was located in what is now the modern-day nation of Turkey. The Byzantines often looted art from ancient Greece. A substantial amount of this art is now in Western museums. Does it belong to Turkey, from which it was taken in modern times, or to Greece, from which it was taken in ancient times?

There are also important concerns about the uses to which such objects are put. Major museums are more than simply research institutions and holding places for antiquities. They are building blocks in creating national identity. For example, the

British Museum, founded in the mid-18th century, collected art from around the world. It promoted the idea of Britain as a national and imperial power. Through the display of objects such as the Elgin Marbles, Britain laid claim to status as the modern heir of ancient empires. Although today the museum is more critical of its role in promoting the British Empire, it continues to display these artworks. National museums today often have similar functions. James Cuno has argued that such museums frequently use artifacts found within their borders to bolster national mythologies that are, to a great degree, fictional: “Etruscan pots (more often than not manufactured in Athens) are used to define Italianness; Sumerian sculptures to define Iraquiness … and so on” (Eakin, 2009, p. 18). According to Cuno, the connections between the modern populations of these nations and the ancient cultures are dubious, and museums press such objects into the service of a spurious nationalism that denies evidence of cultural diversity and promotes ethnic chauvinism.

Anthropologists often find themselves caught in the middle of debates about the repatriation of historical objects. On the one hand, in most cases, anthropologists identify with the aspirations and interests of the people they study. Thus, they often support what they view as people’s legitimate desire to have their objects (and, in some cases, the bodies of their relatives and ancestors) returned to them. On the other hand, anthropologists are also aware that the return of such objects sometimes makes them more difficult to study. Indeed, returned objects may be reburied or destroyed, making further study impossible. Further, large museums often promote the appreciation of cultural diversity, a goal that anthropologists support.

Slavery

Forced labor was another key element of European expansion. The most notorious example was African slavery, but impressing local inhabitants for labor, debt servitude, and other forms of peonage was common. Europeans forced both the peoples whose lands they conquered and their own lower classes into vassalage.

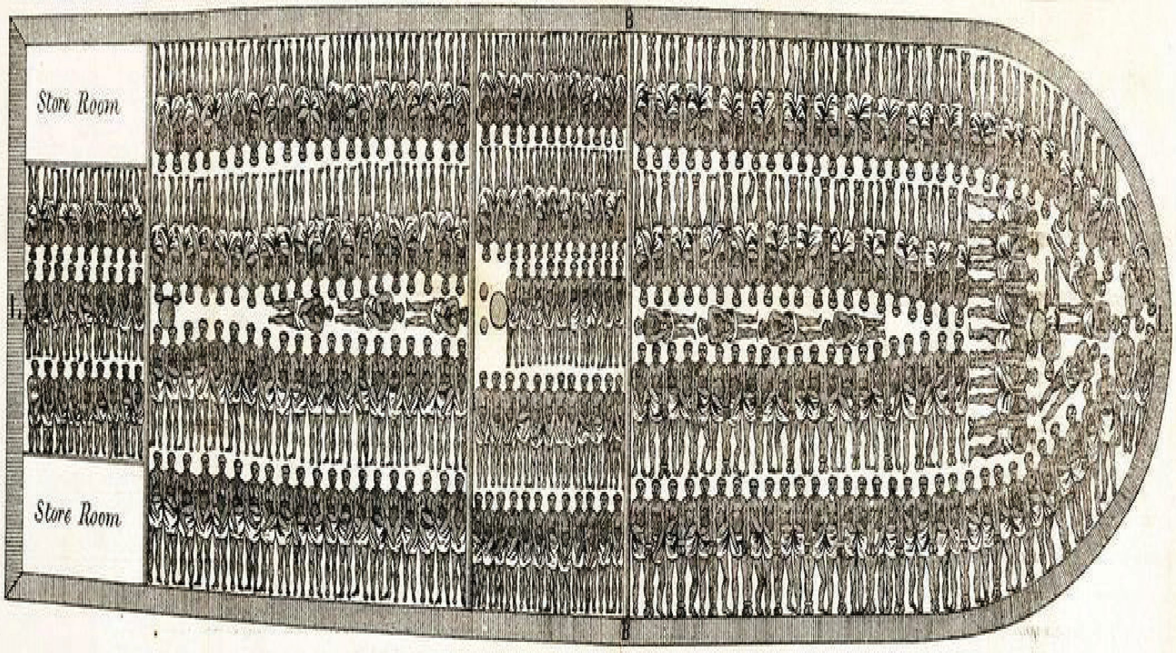
Europeans did not invent slavery in general or African slavery in particular. For example, non-Europeans probably transported more than 7 million African slaves to the Islamic world between 650 and 1600 (Lovejoy, 1983). However, Europeans did practice African slavery on a larger scale than any people before them. Moreover, in the Americas, enslaved people and their descendants were property that could be owned and disposed of at will and across generations. This was not usually true of slavery elsewhere.

Between the late 15th century and the late 19th century, approximately 11.7 million slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas (Figure 15.4). More than 6 million left Africa in the 19th century alone (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1988). No one really knows how many died during the capturing and transferring of slaves within Africa. However, scholars estimate that for each African slave that successfully landed in the Americas, anywhere from one to five other Africans died in the process of capture, holding, and transportation.

PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF 292 SLAVES

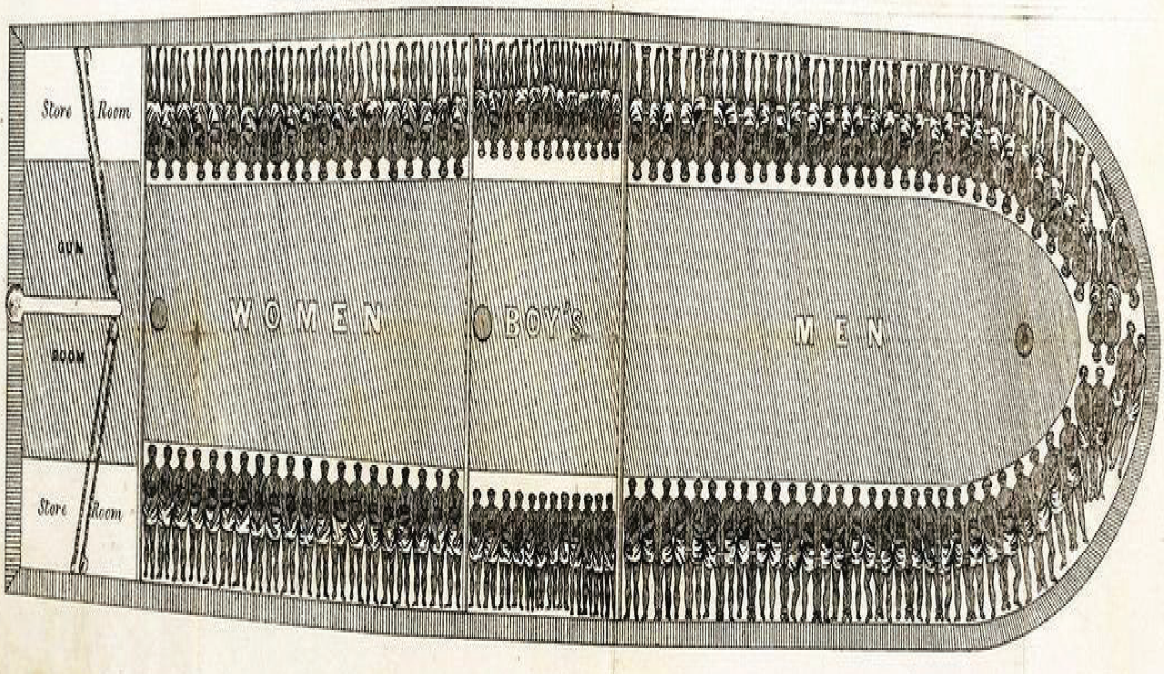
130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHEWN IN FIGURE B & FIGURE 5.

Fig 2.


B
Store Room
Store Room
B

PLAN SHEWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES (IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH) THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES BETWEEN THE BEAMS: AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS. *See Fig 1.*

Fig 3.


Store Room
GUN
ROOM
WOMEN
BOY'S
MEN
Store Room

Description

Figure 15.4 Almost 12 million slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas. This diagram, drawn in 1787, shows the way that 454 people were crammed into the hold of the sailing ship *Brookes* during the ship’s voyage from West Africa to the Caribbean. The lower diagram shows people on a shelf between the lower deck and the top of the hold. People on the shelf and those beneath them had under three feet of vertical clearance.

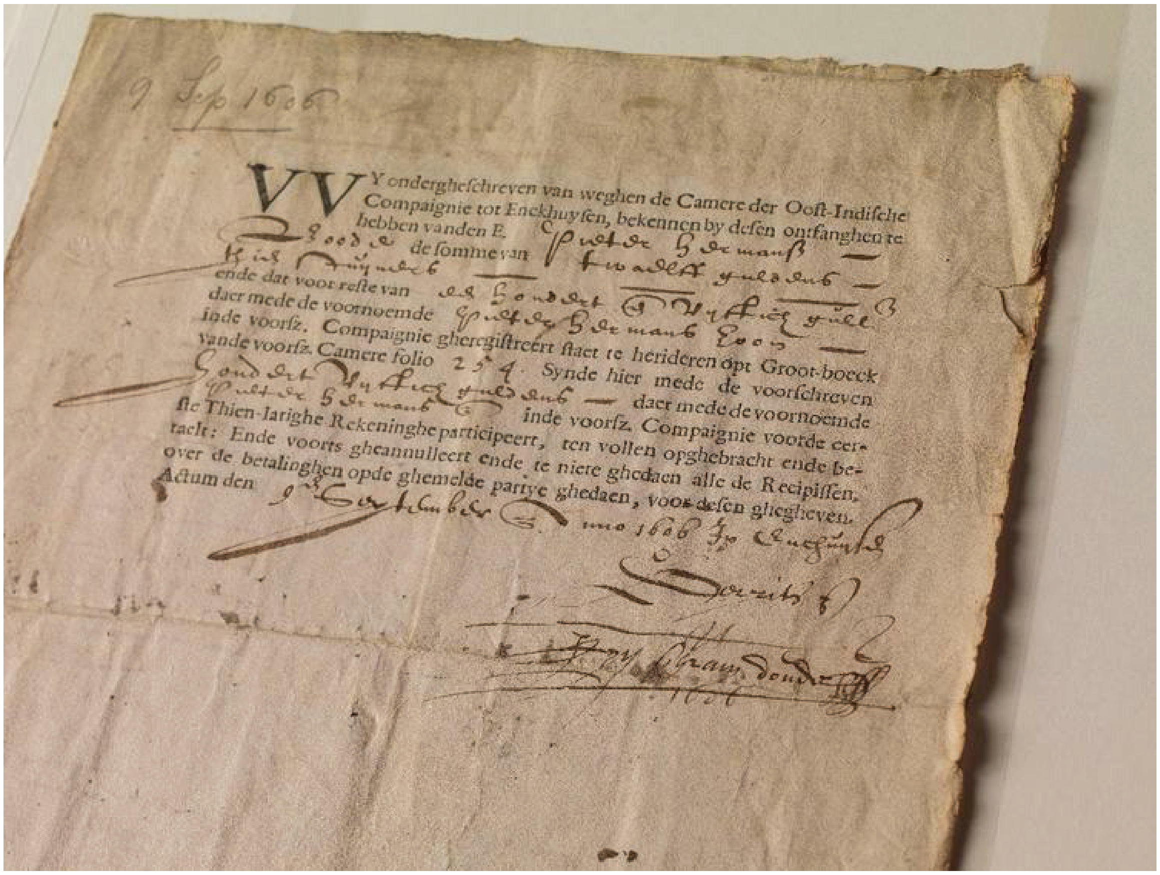
incamerastock/Alamy Stock Photo

The massive transport of people had important economic effects. First, the use of slave labor was extremely profitable for both slave shippers and plantation owners. Second, slave labor created continuous warfare and impoverishment in the areas from which slaves were drawn. Although some in Africa undoubtedly grew rich on the profits of slavery, the loss of so many people and the violence and political instability resulting from the capture and transport of slaves radically altered African societies (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1988).

The demand for slaves was created by **monoculture plantations**—farms devoted to the production of a single crop for sale to distant consumers. Sugar and cotton produced in the Americas and spices produced in Asia were sold to consumers located primarily in Europe. Throughout the 19th century, sugar was the most important monoculture crop. British consumption of sugar increased some 2,500% between 1650 and 1800. Between 1800 and 1890, sugar production grew another 2,500%, from 245,000 tons to more than 6 million tons per year (Mintz, 1985, p. 73). Slaves provided almost all of the massive amount of manual labor required for growing and processing sugar. Between 1701 and 1810, for example, Barbados, a small island given over almost entirely to sugar production, imported 252,500 slaves, almost all of whom were involved in growing and processing sugar (Mintz, 1985, p. 53).

Joint Stock Companies

The **joint stock company** was another innovation that allowed extremely rapid European expansion and led to enormous abuses of power. Most early European exploration was financed and supported by aristocratic governments or small private firms. By the turn of the 17th century, however, the British and Dutch had established joint stock companies. The French, Swedes, Danes, Germans, and Portuguese followed by midcentury. The best known of these companies were the Dutch East India Company (founded 1602), the British East India Company (founded 1600), the Massachusetts Bay Company (founded 1629), and the Hudson’s Bay Company (founded in 1670). Joint stock companies were the predecessors of today’s publicly held corporations. The idea was simple: To raise the capital necessary for large-scale ventures, companies would sell shares (Figure 15.5). Each share entitled its purchaser to a portion of the profits (or losses) from the company’s business.



9 Sep 1606

VVY ondergheſchreven van weghen de Camere der Ooſt-Indiſche Compaignie tot Enckhuyſen, bekennen by deſen ontfanghen te hebben vanden E. Pieter Harmansz [illegible] de ſomme van twaelf gulden [illegible] ende dat voor reſte van een hondert vijftich gulden daer mede de voornoemde Pieter Harmansz Boon inde voorſz. Compaignie gheregiſtreert ſtaet te herideren opt Groot-boeck vande voorſz. Camere folio 254. Synde hier mede de voorſchreven hondert vijftich gulden Pieter Harmansz daer mede de voornoemde inde voorſz. Compaignie voorde eerſte Thien-Iarighe Rekeninghe participeert, ten vollen opghebracht ende betaelt: Ende voorts gheannulleert ende te niete ghedaen alle de Recipiſſen over de betalinghen opde ghemelde partye ghedaen, voor deſen ghegheven. Actum den 9en September Anno 1606 [illegible]

Figure 15.5 The world’s oldest known share certificate, issued by the Dutch East India Company in 1606. Joint stock companies could raise large amounts of capital based on the sale of shares. Such companies had a single-minded devotion to profit that earlier European exploration lacked.

Michel Porro/Getty Images

Exploration and trade conducted by joint stock companies had some critical advantages over earlier forms. First, a great deal of capital could be raised rapidly so business ventures could be much larger than previously possible. Second, joint stock companies existed simply to provide profits to their shareholders. This differentiated them from the aristocratic governments that had previously dominated European exploration. These governments wanted to make money, but they were also motivated by missionary zeal and the desire for prestige. Joint stock companies pursued wealth with a single-mindedness and efficiency that governments often lacked. Because they frequently were empowered to monopolize trade, raise armies and conduct wars, and engage in diplomatic negotiations, they could have devastating effects on the societies they penetrated.

The Dutch East India Company

The **Dutch East India Company** (or VOC, after its initials in Dutch) is a model example of a joint stock company. Using money raised from the sale of shares, the VOC was chartered by the Dutch government to hold the monopoly on all Dutch trade with the societies of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Shares in the VOC were available on reasonable terms and were held by a wide cross section of Dutch society (Scammell, 1989, p. 101). In many ways, the company functioned as a government. Led by a board of directors called the Heeren XVII (the "Gentlemen Seventeen"), it was empowered to make treaties with local rulers in the name of the Dutch Republic, occupy lands, levy taxes, raise armies, and declare war. The fundamental difference between a government and the VOC was that governments were to some degree beholden to those they governed, whereas the VOC was interested solely in returning dividends to its shareholders. Throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, the VOC distributed annual dividends of 15.5% to 50%. It returned dividends of 40% per year for 6 consecutive years from 1715 to 1720 (Boxer, 1965, p. 46). By comparison, the average annual dividend paid by a Standard and Poor's 500 stock index company since 2009 has been below 2% (Ross, 2022).

Throughout the 17th century, the VOC used its power to seize control of many of the Indian Ocean islands. Among these were Java, including the port of Jakarta (which became its headquarters and which it renamed Batavia); Sri Lanka (Ceylon); and Malacca. In addition, the VOC acquired the right to control the production and trade of cloves, nutmeg, and mace, the most valuable spices of the area, and took brutal steps to maintain this monopoly. For example, during the 1620s, virtually the entire population of the nutmeg-producing island of Banda was deported, starved to death, or massacred. They were replaced with Dutch colonists, who then used slave labor to operate the plantations (Ricklefs, 1990). By the 1670s, the Dutch had gained complete control of all spice production in what is now Indonesia (Wolf, 1982). The VOC acquired slaves through warfare, purchase, and levy from China, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, and East Africa. Phillip Winn (2010, p. 366) described the system that resulted as “a totalizing administrative order encompassing labor and environment (including both slaves and estate-holders).”

Natives of this region did not submit passively to VOC control, and the company did not have a clear-cut military advantage. Instead, the VOC rapidly (and ultimately disastrously) became embroiled in the area’s wars. For example, in the 17th century, the Mataram dynasty controlled most of central Java. In 1677, when the dynasty faced rebellion, the VOC intervened on its behalf in hopes of cash payments and trade concessions. In a bloody campaign, the combined VOC and Mataram forces crushed the rebellion and established Emperor Amangkurat II on the throne. Trouble ensued when the VOC received neither payments nor concessions for its assistance. In 1686, the company sent an armed force to make its demands but was defeated by Amangkurat II. The company was unable to recoup its losses or claim its trading privileges (Ricklefs, 1990; Ward, 2011). This was just the beginning of a series of extremely brutal wars pitting different factions of Javanese kingdoms against each other and the VOC. Kingdoms alternately allied with and fought against the VOC as their interests dictated. These conflicts lasted until 1757.

The VOC often acted with extraordinary brutality. The treatment of the Chinese in Batavia is a good example. The Chinese had come to Batavia as traders, skilled artisans, sugar millers, and shopkeepers. Despite the harsh measures that the VOC levied against them, by 1740, roughly 15,000 Chinese lived in the city and formed the beginnings of a non-European middle class. VOC officials accused the Chinese of plotting rebellion, and after an incident in which several

Europeans were killed, VOC governor general Adriaan Valckenier hinted that a massacre would not be unwelcome. In the melee that followed, Europeans and their slaves killed 10,000 Chinese (Figure 15.6). The Chinese quarter of the city burned for several days, and the VOC was able to stop the looting only by paying its soldiers a premium to return to duty (Ricklefs, 1990, p. 90).

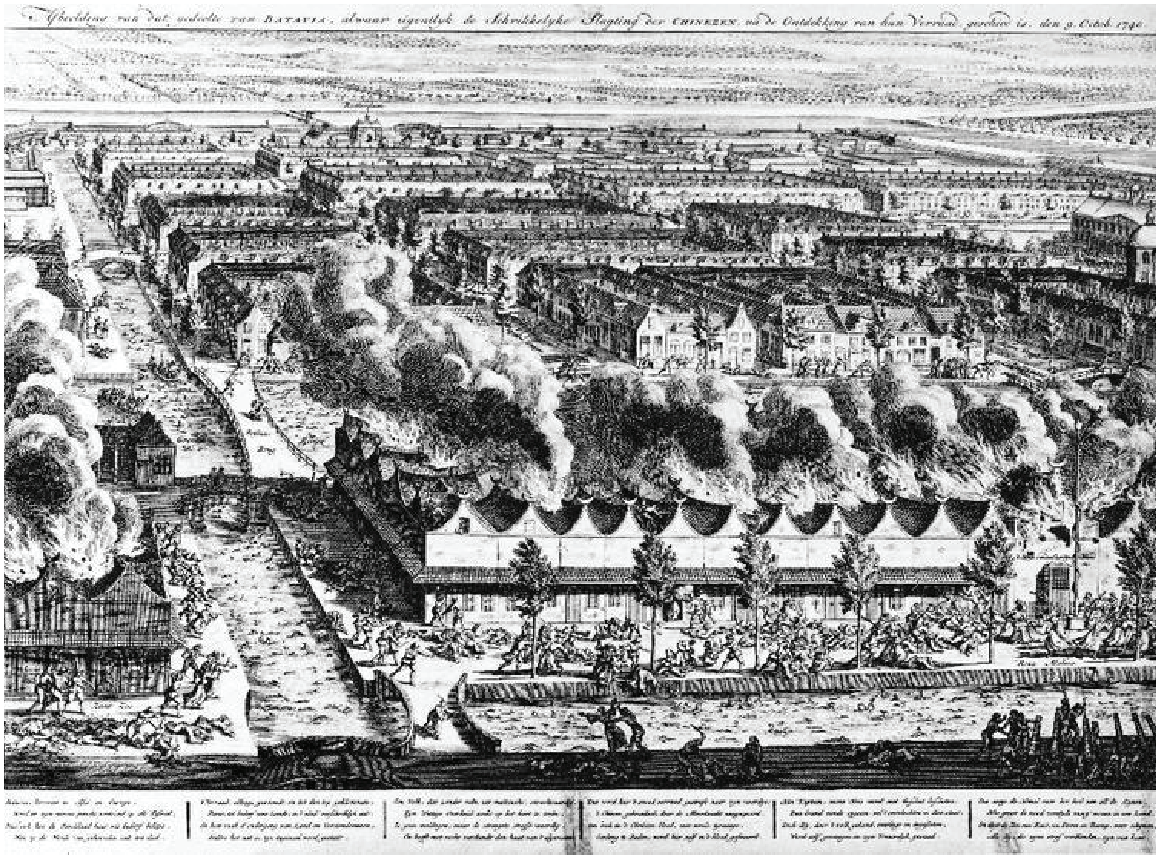

Afbeelding van dat gedeelte van BATAVIA, alwaar eigentlyk de Schrikkelyke Slagting der CHINEZEN, na de Ontdekking van hun Verraad, geschied is, den 9. Octob. 1740.

Figure 15.6 The VOC frequently used brutal methods to maintain control. In 1740, VOC soldiers massacred 10,000 Chinese in Batavia and burned the Chinese parts of town. The massacre is illustrated in this 18th-century engraving.

DeAgostini/Getty Images

The burden of continual warfare, as well as internal corruption and inefficiency, forced the VOC into serious financial difficulties. By the last quarter of the 18th century, large areas of coastal Java had been depopulated by years of warfare, but the VOC had still not succeeded in controlling the principal kingdoms of the island. The members of the Heeren XVII were dismissed by the Netherlands government in 1796 after an investigation revealed corruption and mismanagement in all areas of the company. On December 31, 1799, the VOC was formally dissolved and its possessions were turned over to the Dutch government.

The story of the VOC was, in large measure, repeated by other mercantilist trading firms organized by the British, French, Germans, Portuguese, Danes, and Swedes. In each case, the company generated enormous profits but eventually fell into disarray and either was dissolved or was taken over by its national government. Despite their eventual failure, however, the trading companies placed fantastic riches in the hands of European elites. Europeans invested this wealth in many different ways: in the arts, luxury goods, architecture, and science and industry. This supply of wealth became one of the sources of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism itself.

The effects were far less pleasant for the regions in which the trading companies operated. The VOC and companies like it left poverty and chaos in their wake. In every case, Europeans fundamentally altered the communities with which they came into contact. Brutal policies and disease frequently destroyed entire cultures. However, in most cases, societies were not simply overrun. Before the late 18th century, Europeans did not have a truly decisive technological advantage over others. As a result, in instances where disease did not play a role, they were unable to simply defeat and dominate other cultures. Instead, as with the VOC and the Mataram dynasty, Europeans had to collaborate with local elites, who were often able to use their contact with the foreigners to increase their own wealth and power. However, their societies suffered. For example, the British came to power in India through alliances with local elites. Although the British gained de facto control of almost all of India, until the mid-19th century, they were legally considered subjects of the Mughal emperor in Delhi. It was a relationship that existed in name only. In 1857, a savage war broke out between the British and their supporters and the supporters of the Mughal emperor. The British won this war a year later and formally abolished the Mughal Empire. The British referred to the war as “The Great Mutiny” and understood it as an uprising against British rule. However, technically, it was the British who mutinied, overthrowing the Mughal emperor, their nominal ruler (Dalrymple, 2007).

THE ERAS OF COLONIALISM

Colonialism differs in important ways from the earlier expansion of European power. Whereas much of the initial phase of European expansion was carried out by private companies and often took the form of raid and pillage, **colonialism** involved the active possession of foreign territory by European governments. **Colonies** were created when nations established and maintained political domination over geographically separate areas and political units (Kohn, 1958).

There were several different types of European colonies. Some, such as the Belgian Congo in Africa, existed primarily to exploit native people and resources. In other areas, such as North America and Australia, the key goal was the settlement of Europeans. Still other locales, such as Yemen, which borders the Red Sea and thus controlled shipping through the Suez Canal, were seized because they occupied key strategic locations.

At one time or another, much of the world came under direct European colonization, but the timing of colonialism varied from place to place. The Americas were colonized in the 1500s and 1600s, but most other areas of the world did not come under colonial control until the 19th century. When Europeans confronted others with broadly similar weaponry and military tactics, as they did most places in Asia, the results were indecisive, and local governments were able to retain some autonomy and power. By the 19th century, however, the Industrial Revolution, as well as military tactics developed in European warfare of the 18th century (Dalrymple, 2019), gave Europeans (and their North American descendants) a decisive advantage in the technological sophistication of their weaponry, the quantity of arms they could produce, and the methods of using them. Although European colonizers faced frequent rebellions and proved unable to entirely subdue guerrilla activity across all regions, no other government or army could offer effective resistance to them.

Colonization, 1500 to 1800

Before the 1800s, very little of Africa or Asia was colonized. Europeans were able to establish small coastal settlements in these areas, which were profitable for them and at least some local elites. In most cases, local powers could expel Europeans or strictly limit their activities. Relatively few Europeans settled permanently in these colonies.

In the Americas, the situation was radically different. Europeans quickly established colonies in these regions and immigrated in large numbers. For example, between 1492 and 1600, more than 55,000 Spaniards immigrated to the New World. In the 50 years that followed, another quarter million joined them (Boyd-Bowman, 1975). By comparison, in the first half of the 19th century, the total Dutch population of Indonesia, Holland’s most important colonial possession, was about 2,100 (Zeegers et al., 2004).

There was stiff resistance to European expansion in the Americas. Native Americans and settlers continued to fight wars until the late 19th century, and Europeans were victorious almost everywhere they wanted to expand. The main reason for this success was disease. Europeans, Africans, and Asians shared similar diseases and immunities. New World natives did not. In the wake of contact with Europeans, as much as 95% of the total population of the New World died of new diseases (Karlen, 1995; Mann, 2005; Palkovich, 1994).

Although epidemics may have occasionally been caused intentionally, neither Europeans nor natives had much knowledge of the mechanics of contagion. The vast majority of deaths were not premeditated.

However, Europeans came to see the handiwork of God in the disappearance of native populations. In their view, God clearly intended them to populate the Americas and was removing the native population to make that possible (Figure 15.7).

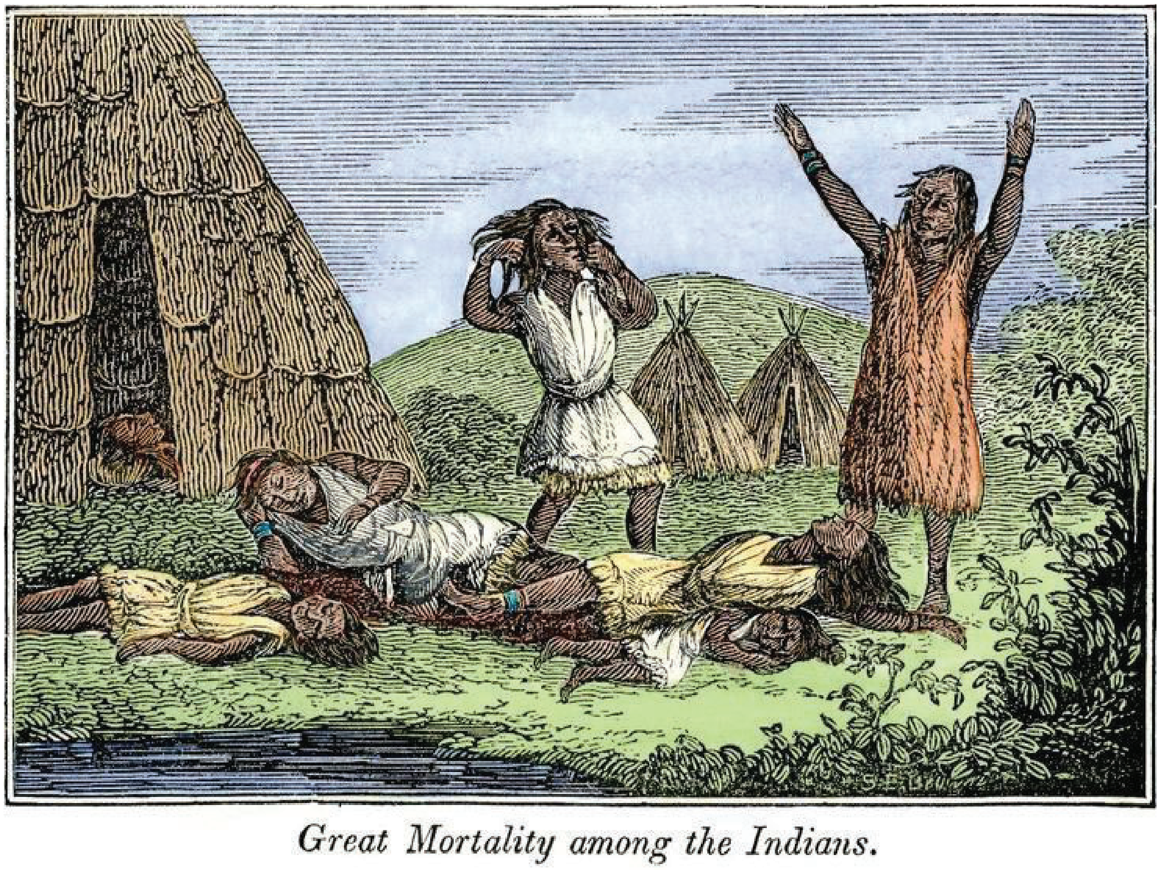

Great Mortality among the Indians.

Figure 15.7 In the wake of contact with Europeans, as much as 95% of the population of the Americas died. Colonial settlers interpreted this to mean that God intended them to populate the land. This colonial-era woodcut shows the Wampanoags grieving for smallpox deaths in Massachusetts.

North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo

New World natives lacked immunity to European diseases for two principal reasons. First, the primary diseases that killed indigenous populations included smallpox, influenza, and tuberculosis. To persist, these diseases need large populations, up to half a million individuals in some cases (Diamond, 1992).[2] Many North American groups were too small to sustain such crowd diseases and therefore lacked immunity to them. Second, although some Central and South American groups did have large populations, most crowd diseases originate in domesticated animals, which were largely absent in the Americas.

Hernan Cortés's conquest of Mexico is a good example of the effects of disease. When Cortés first appeared in 1519, the Aztec leader Montezuma, following tradition, gave Cortés gifts and opened the city of Tenochtitlan to the Spanish. When it became clear that the Spanish were their enemies, the Aztecs expelled them from the city in a fierce battle that cost the Spanish and their allies perhaps two thirds of their total army. By the time Cortés returned in 1521, a smallpox epidemic had killed up to half the Aztecs. Despite this crushing loss, however, the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan still took more than 4 months to accomplish (Berdan, 1982; Clendinnen, 1991; Karlen, 1995). Had the Aztecs not been devastated by disease, they might have again defeated Cortés. Disease played an even bigger part in the conquest of the Incas in Peru. It swept across Central and South America well in advance of the Europeans themselves. By the time Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro reached Peru, the Inca Empire had already been decimated.

The die-off of Native Americans had dire effects throughout the Americas. The increasing numbers of Europeans and the diminishing population of indigenous peoples ensured that resistance to European settlement was not very effective. When John Winthrop, one of the first governors of Massachusetts, declared that the settlers had fair title to the land because it was *vacuum domicilium* (empty land), he was creating a legal fiction as he was well aware of the Natives and their need for agricultural and hunting land (Kiernan, 2007, p. 218). He also knew, however, that the Native population was declining sharply.

If not for disease, the European experience in the Americas would probably have been very similar to its experience in Asia and Africa. Rather than establishing control over vast amounts of territory, Europeans probably would have been confined to small coastal settlements and involved in protracted battles with powerful local kingdoms, as they were in the Indian Ocean region.

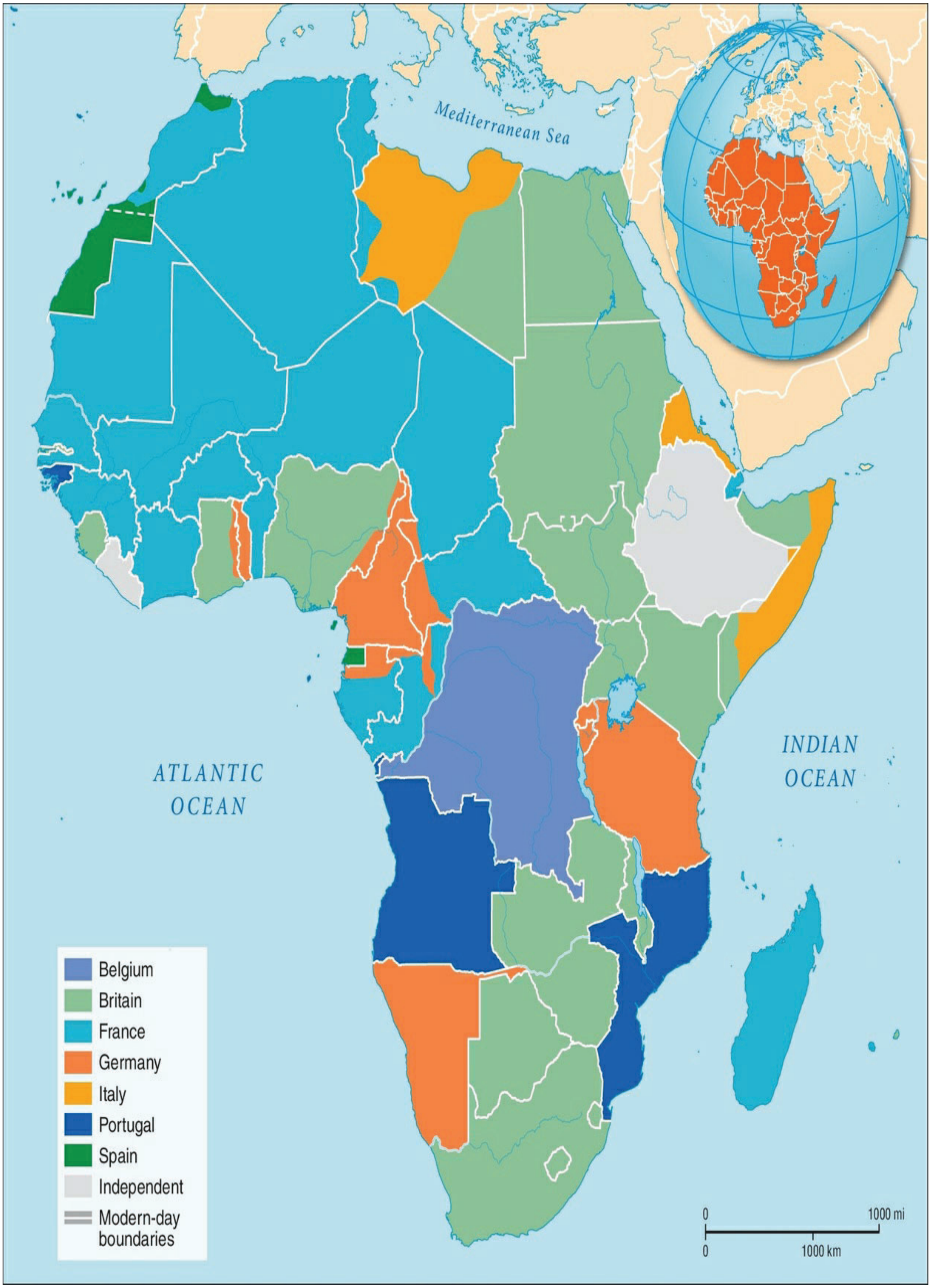
Colonizing in the 19th Century

By the beginning of the 19th century, industrialization was under way in Europe and North America. This had two immediate consequences. First, it enabled Europeans and Americans to produce weapons in greater quantity and quality than any other people. Second, it created an enormous demand for raw materials that could not be satisfied in Europe. In addition, discoveries in medicine, particularly vaccines and antimalarial drugs, improved the odds of survival for Europeans in places previously considered pestilential. Thus, Europeans had both motives and means to colonize.

Acting in their self-interest, Europeans and Americans generally did not move rapidly to place other areas under their colonial control. The primary goal of European expansion continued to be the pursuit of wealth and plunder. Mercantilist firms were rapid, cost-effective ways to get these. The financial burden of establishing companies such as the VOC was borne by their shareholders. However, colonizing an area required some level of government expenditure. At the very least, this included government officials and the troops to back them, all of whom had to be equipped and paid out of government funds. In most cases, infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and railways had to be built. These were expensive undertakings, and European taxpayers and governments were generally not enthusiastic about funding them.

As we have seen, in the 16th and 17th centuries, European mercantilist firms began to assume important roles throughout the world. In many cases, they became governing authorities. However, by the 19th century, corruption, scandal, and warfare created by these firms had led European governments to assume colonial control of areas such as India and Indonesia previously controlled by joint stock companies.

In other cases, particularly in Africa during the 19th century, when mercantilist firms were expanding rapidly, European nations colonized out of fear of each other. Each nation thought the others threatened its national commercial interests. During the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, European nations determined the colonial partition of Africa (Map 15.1). At the time of the conference, Europeans did not yet control most of Africa. The conference set up rules that controlled trade between European powers in Africa and prevented Europeans from fighting each other over control of African territory. Unsurprisingly, no representatives of any African society were present at the conference.


Mediterranean Sea
ATLANTIC OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN
Belgium
Britain
France
Germany
Italy
Portugal
Spain
Independent
Modern-day boundaries
0
1000 mi
0
1000 km

Description

Map 15.1 Some political divisions in Africa created by the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885.

Europeans used a combination of diplomacy and military conquest to force colonization on subject populations. In most cases, they created military forces of native troops led by European officers and used these forces to conquer the areas they wished to colonize. The Tirailleurs Sénégalais described in the Ethnography in this chapter was one such force.

European politicians and military leaders often created colonies without the full backing of the citizens of their nations (and sometimes without the support of their legislatures). Thus, after colonies were established, European governments had to convince both their own populations and their colonial subjects that colonization was beneficial. They attempted to do this by cloaking their actions in the ideology of social betterment. In Britain, citizens were encouraged, in the words of the poet Rudyard Kipling, to take up "the white man's burden" of bringing civilization to the "savage."[3] In France, the population was told that it had a *mission civilisatrice*—a **civilizing mission** that would both help the "savages" in the colonized areas and increase French political and cultural power throughout the world. The government portrayed its colonial practices as *rayonnement*, lighting the way for others (Cole & Raymond, 2006, pp. 158–159). In the colonies, as we will see next, subjects were taught that they were colonized for their own good and that their societies would advance as a result.

MAKING COLONIALISM PAY

Once colonies were seized, they had to be administered and they had to be made profitable. Colonizing powers hoped that tax revenues from colonial subjects would support the cost of colonial government as well as the construction of various public works. However, in many cases, taxes were insufficient, and taxpayers in the colonizing country were required to make up the difference between colonial income and expenses. Despite the frequent insufficiencies of tax collection, colonies were extremely profitable (Bagchi, 2002; Frankema, 2011).

Colonies gave businesses based in the colonizing country places in which they could operate free of competition. This was particularly significant for Britain and France, two of the most important colonial powers. The Industrial Revolution had begun in Britain in the late 1700s, and by the end of the 19th century, its factories were aging. New, more efficient industrial processes developed in the United States and Germany that enabled these countries to produce cheaper manufactured goods (Allitt, 2002). France came to industrialization fairly late and had a relatively weak road and rail network. As a result, it had difficulty competing with the United States, Germany, and Britain. Colonies created zones of protection for older British industries and newer French manufacturers, thus enabling high profits for firms in these nations.

As noted previously, the costs of the colonies were borne (unequally) by subject colonial populations and by colonizing-country taxpayers. The windfall profits from colonialism went to shareholders of companies operating in the colonies.

Finding ways to extract taxes and create the conditions in which corporations could make money often meant the systematic undermining of indigenous ways of life. The newly colonized communities had traded with other regional communities and frequently with Europeans for centuries. However, trading had generally accounted for only a small percentage of their economy. For the most part, their economic relations were drawn along kinship lines, and most of their production was for their own consumption. For colonialism to be profitable, these patterns had to change. Colonial subjects had to be made to produce the goods that colonizing societies wanted and to labor in ways that would be profitable to the colonizers. From the colonizers’ perspective, the key problem was determining how to implement these changes. Some of the methods they used were control of local leaders, forced labor, forced production of specific commodities, taxation, and direct propaganda through education.

Sometimes colonial powers seized direct control of a colony’s political leadership, but this was expensive, and foreign colonial leaders often lacked sufficient knowledge of the local language and culture. More often, colonialists ruled indirectly through native leaders (Figure 15.8). Promises of power and wealth as well as the realization that colonial governments held the reins of power and were unlikely to lose them any time soon convinced colonial subjects to support them. In some cases, colonial powers (and Christian missionaries) offered education, employment, and improved status to people who were oppressed or outcasts in precolonial society; these individuals were particularly likely to support the colonizers.

Figure 15.8 Colonial powers often ruled indirectly through local chiefs. Here, Frederick Lugard (1858–1945, center), the first governor-general of Nigeria and a pioneer of indirect rule, visits the London Zoo accompanied by African chiefs in 1934.

Fox Photos/Getty Images

A well-organized chain of command was needed for colonial powers to rule effectively. In hierarchical societies where kings or chiefs already existed, this did not pose a difficult problem. Most often, local elites sympathetic to the colonizers were able to retain a degree of power, although they became answerable to the colonial authorities. Those unsympathetic to colonial rule were rapidly replaced.

Regions where precolonial relationships were largely egalitarian posed a more difficult problem. If there was no chief or there were many co-reigning chiefs, establishing colonial authority was far harder. Colonizers tried to solve this problem by creating new chiefly offices. Sometimes colonialists and missionaries forged entire new ethnic groups, lumping together people with different traditions and even different languages (Harries, 1987). For example, the Bété, an ethnic group of the central Ivory Coast in Africa, did not exist before the era of colonialism but was created by the actions of colonial and postcolonial governments (Dozon, 1985).

In the long run, policies of indirect rule created the preconditions for instability and violence. Political leaders were compromised by their close connections with colonial authorities and lost the confidence and respect of those they purported to lead. Ethnic groups created for colonial rule tended to fragment as the power of colonial governments diminished.

Forced Labor

One of the most direct ways that European governments tried to make their colonies profitable was by requiring them to provide manpower. Governments required **corvée labor**—unpaid work from the native populations. The British often compelled their subjects to work for up to 1 month per year; the Dutch, 2 months. In 1926, the French enacted a law that permitted an annual draft of labor for their West African colonies. Conscripts were compelled to work for 3 years on bridge and road building, irrigation projects, and other public works. The mortality rates of workers on these projects were very high, making corvée labor one of the most hated institutions of colonialism. Natives resisted colonial demands by concealing workers or by fleeing from authorities when such work was required (Evans, 2000; Ishemo, 1995). Most corvée labor requirements continued until World War II.

Even when subject populations were not forced into labor gangs, the economic and social policies of colonial regimes required them to radically alter their cultures. For example, Portuguese colonial policy in Mozambique forced almost 1 million peasants to grow cotton. The colonial government controlled what these growers produced, where they lived, with whom they traded, and how they organized their labor. Although a few growers prospered, the great majority became impoverished and struggled to survive famine and hardship (Isaacman, 1996). By the 1960s, the brutality and terror used by the colonial regime resulted in a civil war that continued into the 1990s.

At the turn of the century, conditions were perhaps worst in the Congo, which was ruled between 1885 and 1908 as the personal property of King Leopold II of Belgium. There, each native owed the government or European companies up to 280 days of labor per year (Fall & Roberts, 2019, p. 21). Failure to work sufficiently or to produce the proper quantities of goods (particularly rubber) was met with extreme measures. Leopold’s subjects were held hostage, were beaten or whipped, had their hands cut off, and, in many cases, were killed outright (Figure 15.9). By the time the Belgian government stripped Leopold of his control of Congo, between 4 million and 8 million Congolese had been killed or had starved to death (A. Hochschild, 1998).

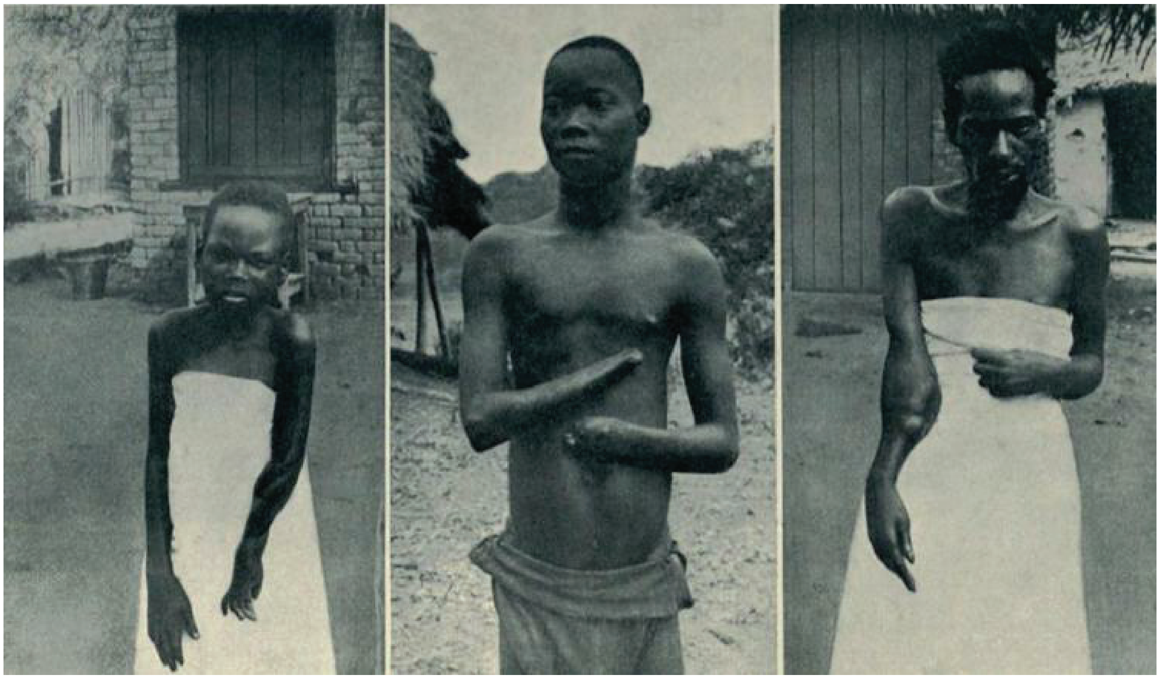


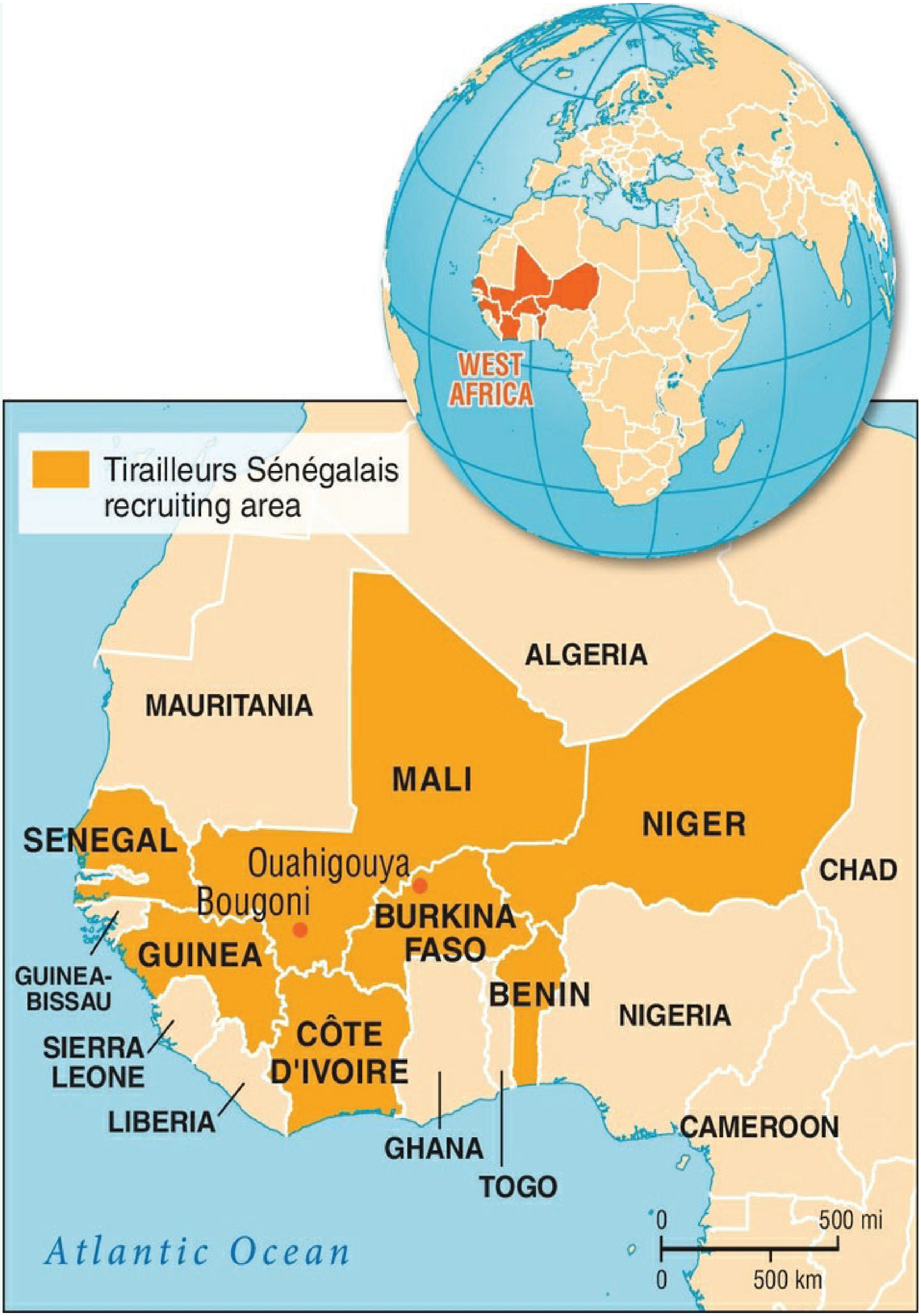
Figure 15.9 Congo was ruled between 1885 and 1908 as the personal property of King Leopold II of Belgium and exploited for its rubber production. Natives were forced to collect rubber for the Belgian king. Failure to meet the quota was punished by torture or death. An estimated 4 to 8 million Congolese were either murdered or starved during this era. Here, photos of children shot and tortured by rubber traders.

Everett Collection Historical/Alamy Stock Photo

In addition to forced labor and forced production, the British and French both drafted natives into their armed forces. They used these armies to capture and control their colonies, fight colonial wars, and augment their regular armies wherever needed. Additional tirailleurs units included groups from Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar, Vietnam, Cambodia, and other French colonial possessions. In East Africa, the British drafted and recruited the King’s African Rifles. In India, the British created an entire army led by British officers but consisting almost entirely of native colonial subjects drawn primarily from ethnic groups the British considered particularly warlike. According to the United Kingdom's National Archives, about 1.3 million members of the Indian Army served in World War I, primarily on the Western Front but also in the Middle East.

Ethnography

African Soldiers of Misfortune


WEST AFRICA
Tirailleurs Sénégalais recruiting area
ALGERIA
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
CHAD
SENEGAL
Ouahigouya
Bougoni
BURKINA FASO
GUINEA
GUINEA-BISSAU
BENIN
NIGERIA
SIERRA LEONE
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
LIBERIA
GHANA
TOGO
CAMEROON
Atlantic Ocean
0
500 mi
0
500 km

Description

Map 15.2 Areas of West Africa where members of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais were drafted and recruited.

When I (Rich Warms) was young, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer and lived in a town called Ouahigouya in the country then called Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) in West Africa. I spent most of my time working in small villages, but I'd also wander around the town. Frequently on my wanderings, I'd be stopped by a grizzled-looking old man who would start yelling at me in German. Then in French (the language of government and education in Upper Volta), he'd inform me that he'd been a prisoner of the Germans in World War II. At first, I took him to be a crazy person and a drunk (he always stopped me near a bar). But, as I got to know him and other residents of the town better, I learned he had indeed been a German prisoner. That left me wondering how it was possible. After all, I didn't think he could have been visiting Europe when the war broke out. As I spoke to him and many others like him over the 15 years that followed, I learned a story that had been left out of my high school and college history lessons.

Europeans saw in their colonies not only opportunities for the extraction of mineral and agricultural wealth but also reservoirs of manpower. This was particularly true in Africa, which, since the 16th century, had served Europeans as a source of labor. Both the British and the French saw the military potential of African labor, and both formed armies composed of colonized Africans. The British unit was known as the King's African Rifles, and the French unit was the **Tirailleurs Sénégalais** (Senegalese riflemen). The Tirailleurs Sénégalais was officially created in 1857. At that time, most of its soldiers were slaves, bought by the French for army service. Armed with French weaponry and led by French officers, their first task was the capture and control of colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.

The French completed their empire in Africa by the turn of the 20th century, but the Tirailleurs Sénégalais were not disbanded. Instead, powerful interests in France argued that Africans had an obligation to serve the French state and could revitalize its army. The first practical trial of this idea was in 1912 when the Tirailleurs Sénégalais was used to quell a rebellion in Morocco, but the real test came in World War I. More than 135,000 African troops, mostly drafted conscripts, served for the French in the trenches of Europe, and almost 30,000 of them died there (Page, 1987). Those who survived made their way back to Africa between 1918 and 1919. Like many other veterans of World War I, they had witnessed horrors incomprehensible to most of their countrymen. And like European and American soldiers suffering from “shell shock,” members of this group were often considered deranged.

Though manpower needs lessened after World War I, France continued to draft African men into the Tirailleurs Sénégalais. Historian Myron Echenberg wrote that French conscription in West Africa was “indeed a tax in sweat and blood” (1991, p. 47). Between World Wars I and II, hundreds of thousands of Africans were conscripted into the army, and by 1939, on the eve of World War II, about 9% of the French army in France was composed of Africans. By the end of that war, France had recruited (most often drafted) more than 200,000 Africans; of these, as many as 25,000 perished. In addition, France’s African possessions were also taxed heavily to provide food and raw materials for the war effort (Lawler, 1992).

The role African troops played was critical for France in World War II. Most people with some familiarity with history have heard of General Charles de Gaulle’s Free French Army, but few realize that between the fall of France in 1940 and the summer of 1944, most of the members of the Free French Army were Africans. Even in late 1944, sub-Saharan Africans constituted as much as one fifth of the total French army. For political reasons, both during and after the war, de Gaulle concealed the importance of African contributions, but events in France might have taken a very different course without African soldiers (Echenberg, 1991, p. 104).

After the war, the returned soldiers occupied an important place in African society. Veterans were often respected by their peers because they understood modernity, foreigners, and, in particular, the French (Lawler, 1992, p. 212). In addition, the sacrifices veterans had made gave them a degree of moral suasion over the French colonialists. Veterans emerged as leaders, organizers, and agitators in the fight for African independence. The French, meanwhile, continued to enlist Africans in the Tirailleurs Sénégalais and used them against natives fighting wars of independence in Indochina (Vietnam) and Algeria in the 1950s.

Most of the French colonies in Africa received their independence in the early 1960s. The years since then have not been kind to the veterans of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais. The military service that gave them moral power as subjects of France was something of an embarrassment after independence. Members of radical governments and younger people saw them as men who had wasted their time in the service of a discredited authority. They were considered promoters of colonialism rather than, more accurately, its victims. By the 1990s, the veterans of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais were rapidly aging and all but forgotten. Their struggles and trials seemed irrelevant to the young. Most rarely talked about their experiences except with those who shared them.

I was privileged to interview veterans of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais in the 1980s and 1990s (Figure 15.10). Some veterans had used pensions they received to marry several wives and raise large families. These men often became prosperous and well-respected members of their communities.

Some of the veterans look back on their military careers with pride and some fondness. One said, “Well, [my military career was] the work of God. It’s the way God made it to be … I had love for the army, and because of my love for the army, I was able to continue serving” (in Warms, 1996).

Figure 15.10 Veterans of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais in Bougouni, Mali, 1994.

Most veterans, however, received no pension. When they returned home, they often faced hostility or isolation. Fellow villagers couldn’t understand their experiences and often thought poorly of them because they had returned with nothing to show for their labors. For these veterans, military service was best forgotten. One said,

> When you come back, you have to follow the ideas of the people in the village. If not, if you try to tell them all about the army and what you have seen, they are never going to understand you. You can explain things and there are those who will just say you are lying. You just let them alone, at least that’s the way I’ve gotten along. (in Warms, 1996)

Even those veterans who received pensions were given far less than French veterans and received few services. Though they are proud of their accomplishments, they often felt like forgotten men, and many are profoundly disillusioned. In 1991, Mory Samake, a veteran of World War II, told me,

> When we were there fighting the war, no one said “this

> one is white, this one is black." … We gave our blood and our bodies so that France could be liberated. But now, since they have their freedom, they have thrown us away, forgotten us. If you eat the meat, you throw away the bone. France has done just that to us. (in Warms, 1996)

The story of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais and Mory Samake's anger with the French reminds us of several extremely important points. A cliché has it that history is written by the winners. It might be more accurate to say that history is written by the powerful and often presented as a narrative of their inevitable triumph. But such a history ignores inconvenient truths or relegates them to footnotes and appendices. The relationships between wealth and poverty and between the powerful and the powerless—or, in this case, between the colonized and the colonizer—are among the most important of these truths.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Although the Tirailleurs Sénégalais played an important role in World War II, most readers of this book probably haven't heard of them. Why do you think that is so?
2. Most West African veterans live in conditions that would be considered deep poverty in France. What obligations, if any, does France have to these men and their families?
3. Veterans of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais fought for the French, sometimes against other colonized people. How do you think they justified their participation in these colonial wars?

Taxation

Although particular projects might use forced labor, to make a colony truly profitable, colonial masters needed to encourage the population to work for them voluntarily or to produce the goods they desired. Taxation was a key mechanism for accomplishing this goal. Taxation helped support colonial governments, but because colonizers knew that colonial economies were small and their tax receipts low, they rarely expected taxes to provide the full cost of governing. However, taxing colonial subjects had another purpose: to force them into the market system. Taxes generally had to be paid in colonial money, which native subjects could obtain only by working for a colonist or by producing something that the colonists wanted to buy. Participation in the market and wage labor was viewed as the essential precondition for “civilizing” the natives.

Taxation often forced colonial subjects into a vicious cycle of dependency on the market system. To raise money for taxes, subjects had to work directly for the colonizers or produce things that the colonizers desired. But spending time on these tasks meant that less time could be spent making goods or raising crops for one’s own consumption. This, in turn, meant that food and goods had to increasingly be purchased from the market, which was dominated by companies owned by colonialists. This process meant that colonial subjects became more and more enmeshed in a global capitalist economy. They entered this economy as producers of raw materials and consumers of manufactured goods. Thus, they received relatively low prices for the goods they produced but paid relatively high prices for those they purchased. Both the manufacturing processes and ownership of the corporations were located in the colonizing countries, and this helped wealthy countries profit from their colonies.

Education

In addition to policies aimed at forcing subjects to take part in an economy centered in the industrial world, colonial governments took more direct aim at indigenous cultures through educational policies. Colonial education was often designed to convince subjects that they were the cultural, moral, and intellectual inferiors of those who ruled them (Figure 15.11). For example, education in 19th-century India encouraged children to aspire to be like the ideal Englishman (Viswanathan, 1988). In France’s African colonies, children were taught to obey their colonial masters. For example, a reader from the turn of the 20th century, designed for use in village schools, describes the travels of two young African boys with a European merchant. Throughout the book, the merchant repeatedly tells the boys that, on the one hand, goodness has nothing to do with skin color, but, on the other, French occupation has driven “barbarism, massacre, and sufferings from the country.” In a typical passage, the merchant tells the children,

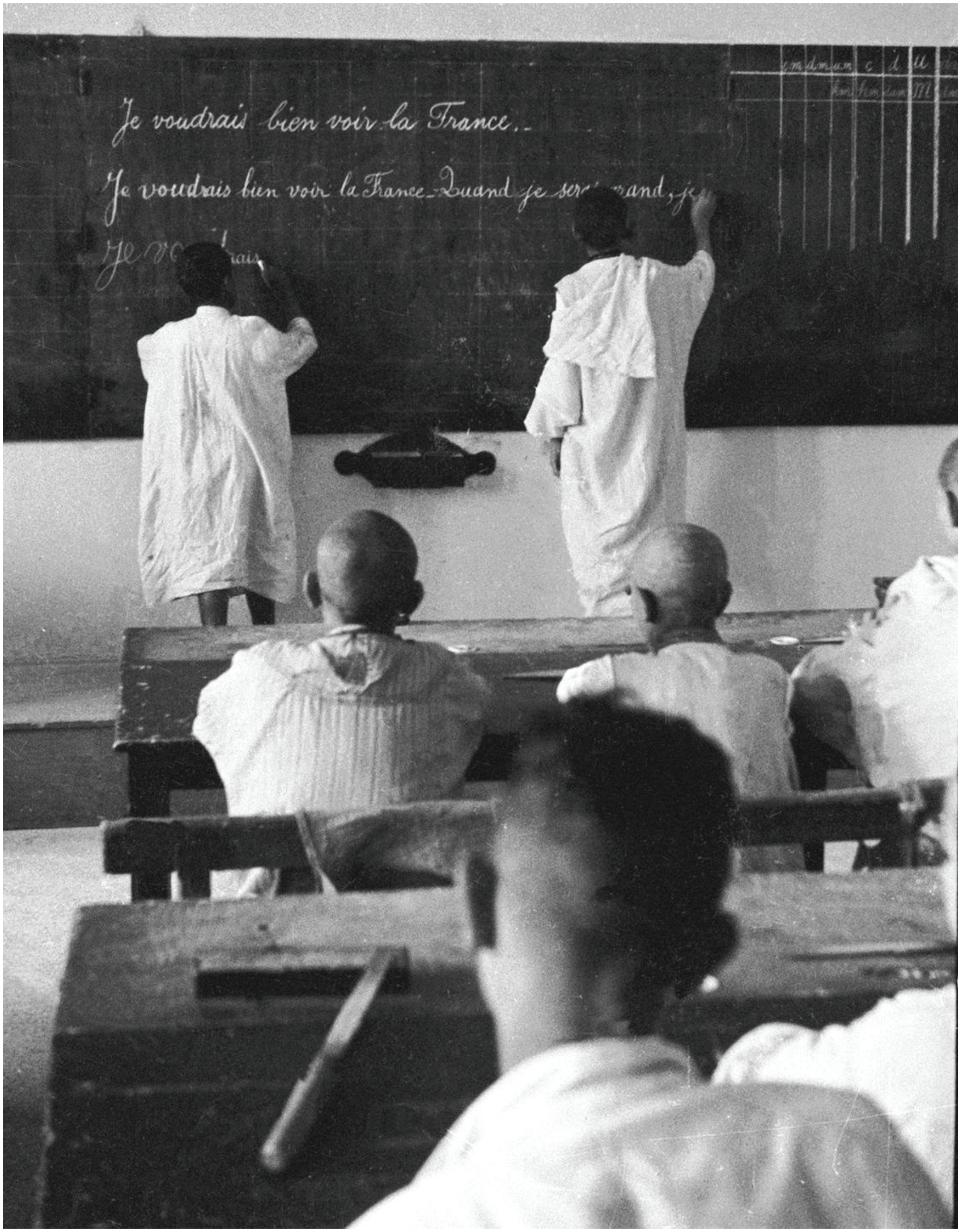

Je voudrais bien voir la France..
Je voudrais bien voir la France_Quand je serai grand, je

Figure 15.11 Education was key to the colonial project. Here, students in the French colony of Algeria in 1950 write, “When I grow up I would love to visit France” on a

classroom chalkboard.

Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

> It is … an advantage for a native to work for a white man, because the Whites are better educated, more advanced in civilization than the natives, and because, thanks to them, the natives will make more rapid progress … and become one day really useful men…. You who are intelligent and industrious, my children, always help the Whites in their task. (Quoted in Buell, 1928, pp. 62–63)

Other passages extol the virtues of the French army, which must “be loved and respected.” After hearing this, one of the boys declares that he wants to be a soldier (quoted in Buell, 1928, p. 63).

Instructors trained in France to teach in African colonies were warned against providing too much information about Europe to their students. An instruction manual for such teachers warned them that “the African has no need to learn of our troubles” (quoted in Kelly, 1984, p. 538).

Education was often aimed at the children of elites. For example, in the 1860s, Louis Faidherbe, the governor-general of the French West African colony of Senegal, established a “school for hostages” (*école des otages*) and “requested” that newly conquered chiefs send their sons to be educated. Although the name of the school was eventually changed to the “school for chiefs” (*école des chefs*), many of the students really were hostages. Chiefs and other notables often sent the sons of slaves and prisoners rather than their own children (Bouche, 1966, p. 234). At these schools, colonizing powers tried to create a class of literate subjects who would serve as junior-grade civil servants. The children were taught skills that would be useful to them in such occupations. They were also taught that, although they might never reach the level of the colonists, they were considerably more advanced than their uneducated countrymen. In France’s African colonies, individuals who were educated and assimilated to French culture were known both by the French and by themselves as *evolues*, or evolved people. This increased the perception of the uneducated and unassimilated as being backward and primitive. Thus, schooling both reinforced the colonizers’ position and created a subservient educated class convinced of its own superiority (Kelly, 1986).

Colonialism and Anthropology

The origins and practice of modern anthropology are bound up with the colonial era. Both anthropology and 19th-century colonialism are products of the 18th-century age of European enlightenment, the romantic retrenchment of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution, the birth of modern science, and other historical and philosophical forces. For example, the evolutionary theories of 19th-century anthropologists described a world in which all societies were evolving toward perfection. This idea shows elements of enlightenment rationality (the anthropologists were systematizing knowledge and trying to discover laws of social development) and 19th-century romanticism (the idea that nations were moving toward perfection) and was very clearly influenced by the scientific theories of Charles Darwin and the social theories of Herbert Spencer. It was also a convenient philosophy that could be pressed into service as a rationale for colonization (Ghosh, 1991; Godelier, 1993).

One of the most important impacts colonialism had on anthropology was in determining the locations of fieldwork. British Commonwealth anthropologists tended to work in British colonies, French anthropologists in their colonies, and Americans within U.S. borders in areas “protected” by the Monroe Doctrine or in regions under American influence and control in the Pacific.

In some cases, colonialism may have played a role in determining the topics of anthropological research. Studies of indigenous political systems or laws were of interest to colonial governments. For example, Evans-Pritchard’s classic exploration of the segmentary lineage system of the Nuer (discussed in Chapter 9) was done at a time when the British rulers of Sudan were particularly interested in learning how to rule groups like the Nuer that lacked unified political leadership (D. Johnson, 1982).

Colonialism and, more important, the discourse of rationalism and science also tended to promote a kind of anthropology where the anthropologist spoke as an active authority claiming to objectively describe essentially passive native subjects. Anthropologists, anxious to find funding for their research, argued that their studies had practical value to colonial administrators (see Malinowski, 1929a, for example). However, anthropology did not come into being to promote or enable colonialism, which would have gone on with or without it (J. Burton, 1992).

Anthropologists did not generally question the political reality of colonialism, but they often self-consciously tried to advance the interests of the people they studied. The result was that colonial officials generally mistrusted anthropologists, believing they were much too sympathetic to native colonial subjects (Prah, 1990). Evans-Pritchard, for example, hoped that his explanations of Nuer life would humanize British colonialism in Sudan. However, British colonial officials found him arrogant and skeptical, sometimes claiming that he was a “wild anthropologist” and “one of those de-nationalized scientists who take pride in advertising their freedom from the simpler loyalties” (Johnson, 1982, pp. 244, 244f). Most anthropological research was financed by private charitable organizations with reformist agendas and not by governments (Goody, 1995). Sometimes anthropologists financed their own research. The great French ethnographer Marcel Griaule, for example, put on a circus and promoted boxing matches to finance his ethnographic expeditions.

DECOLONIZATION

The eras of Western expansion and colonization radically and permanently changed the world. By the time of World War II, all people had been affected by Western expansion, and their cultures had been altered by this experience. Some, in an attempt to resist foreign influences and protect their ways of life, had moved as far away from outsiders as possible (e.g., see Breusers, 1999). However, most people lived in societies where the presence and influence of outsiders, their demands for goods and labor, and their attempts to change native cultures were fundamental facts of life.

Most of the nations of the Americas had gained their independence in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Africa and Asia, independence from European colonialism was not achieved until after World War II. Many nations that were part of the Soviet Union only received their independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Russian attacks on Ukraine in the 2010s and 2022 may be part of an attempt to reinstate colonialism there. Some colonies persist today, although usually with the consent of the majority of their residents. For example, Britain has some 14 “overseas territories,” including Bermuda, Gibraltar, and the Pitcairn Islands. French “overseas departments and regions” (*départements et regions d’outre-mer*) include Martinique and French Guiana. U.S. “organized unincorporated territories” include American Samoa and Guam. Many consider the U.S. relationship with Puerto Rico colonial as well (Grosfoguel, 2003; Melendez, 1993).

There were as many reasons for granting colonies their independence as there were for exploring and colonizing them in the first place, but the three most important were civil disobedience, changing political structures, and changing economic structures. Governing colonies was never a simple affair, and natives rebelled against colonial rule from the beginning. Strikes, acts of terrorism, and guerrilla warfare were common in some regions throughout the colonial era. However, for several reasons, there was a substantial upsurge in these tactics following World War II. One reason was the return of combat veterans. Veterans knew how to fight European-style warfare. Moreover, they and their supporters felt that colonizing countries owed them a debt for their service—a debt to be paid partially in increased political liberties.

In some places, resistance took the form of agitation and demonstrations. For example, in Côte d’Ivoire (West Africa), French attempts to rig elections in the late 1940s were answered with hunger strikes, mass demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and street fighting that resulted in scores of deaths, hundreds of injuries, and thousands of arrests (T. Smith, 1978, p. 87). In Kenya in East Africa, Kikuyu people attacked British settlers. In response, the British constructed a series of detention camps that ultimately held between 160,000 and 320,000 prisoners. In addition, they created 800 enclosed villages, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers, effectively confining the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million (Figure 15.12). In addition to disease and starvation, prisoners in the detention camps suffered torture, including beatings, sexual assault, and castration (Elkins, 2022, 2007). In India, Mahatma Gandhi led supporters in hunger strikes and mass protests. Bitter anticolonial wars broke out around the world. In Madagascar, for example, almost 90,000 died in a rebellion in 1947 and 1948. Between 1954 and 1962, France fought a protracted war in Algeria that left at least a quarter of a million dead (Kepel, 2005). Anticolonial wars also broke out in Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, and numerous other places.

Figure 15.12 Kikuyu prisoners interned at the Thompson Falls detention camp in Kenya in 1953. In addition to disease and starvation, prisoners in the detention camps suffered torture, including beatings, sexual assault, and castration.

© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

The end of World War II also created a fundamentally different balance of world power. European nations, which held the largest number of colonies, were greatly weakened, which left the United States and the Soviet Union as the dominant superpowers. They quickly engaged each other in a Cold War that was to last for more than four decades. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had a strong interest in preserving the colonial status quo. Based on the belief that they could bring former colonies into their own economic and political orbit, both promoted rapid independence for colonial possessions and supplied money and weaponry to their supporters within the colonies.

Finally, international economics was also changing. In many cases, colonies had been created to allow European corporations access to areas where they could operate free of competition from corporations based in other nations. However, in the wake of World War II, corporate ownership began to become multinational, and corporations were less tied to their nations of origin—a shift that continues today. This process undercut an important economic rationale of colonialism.

By December 1960, when the United Nations declared in Resolution 1514 that “all peoples have the right to self determination” and that “immediate steps shall be taken … to transfer all powers to the peoples of [countries that have not yet achieved independence],” the process of decolonization was already well under way. At that time, recently decolonized nations included India and Pakistan (1947), Cambodia (1953), Vietnam (1954), Ghana (1957), Guinea (1958), and many others.

By the late 1970s, almost all colonies held by nations of Western Europe had achieved independence. With the formal end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse of South African apartheid in 1994, almost all areas of the world had some form of home rule.

Colonized areas became independent under a variety of circumstances and with many different levels of preparedness. In some, like Ghana, the transition to independence was reasonably orderly, and a sizable (though still inadequate) number of individuals had been trained as administrators. In others, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, the transition was profoundly violent, and very few native colonial subjects had any experience with running a government. Despite their differences, however, all came to independence as relatively poor nations in a world that was increasingly divided into the wealthy and the poor rather than the independent and the colonized.

Formal independence was critical for former colonies. However, compelling connections between newly independent nations and their former colonial powers remained. In most cases, diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties between nations and their former colonies continued to be strong. European and American corporations continued their operations, albeit frequently with new names, and many former colonies continued to supply the raw materials for European, American, and Asian industries. For example, in Côte d’Ivoire, the number of French expatriates actually increased after independence, rising from 30,000 in 1960 to almost 60,000 by 1980 (Handloff & Roberts, 1991, p. 93). In the 1960s, the word *neocolonialism* came to express the idea that although nations were no longer colonized, many of the institutions of colonialism remained intact in them.

Conclusion: An Interconnected but Unstable World

The European expansion and the era of colonization were historic processes that changed the world from a collection of relatively independent economies and societies to a complex world system. The UN resolution declaring that all people had the right to self-determination was intended to end colonialism but instead exposed severe fault lines in both colonized territories and nation-states. As we saw in Chapter 7 on political systems, nation-states are imagined communities composed of members of different groups. These groups almost always share geographical territory. If every group within a state has the right to self-determination, the state cannot exist.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have been characterized by frequent intense conflicts within and among nation-states as groups have fought both for self-determination and to impose their vision of the state on others. Several nations have disintegrated under this pressure, including Czechoslovakia (split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1992), Yugoslavia (dissolved 1992–2008), Ethiopia (split, creating the nation of Eritrea in 1993), and Sudan (split, creating the nation of Southern Sudan in 2011). In other places, such as Iraq, Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine, bitter wars were (and, in many cases, still are) being fought over ethnic and state identity. In still other places, such as Belgium, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Spain, there is little risk of large-scale violence, but political and economic disputes are often increased by ethnic tensions.

Despite the violence and instability of the world, the interconnections among societies steadily increased from the end of World War II through the first decades of the 21st century. Our world is characterized by enormous disparities in wealth and power and by a dense fabric of interwoven technology, finance, communication, and politics. There is no doubt that modernity has spread to virtually all places in the world. This process of extreme globalization interacts with and may replace both neocolonialism and postcolonialism. However, for the foreseeable future, societies provide enormous hope for their people but face enormous problems and inequities as well. We turn to some of those hopes and problems in the next chapter.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: GLOBALIZATION, NATIONALISM, AND COLONIALISM

Question: Are Nationalism and Globalization Forces That Oppose Each Other?

While campaigning in 2016, Donald Trump declared that the United States would “no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism” (in Rosenboim, 2017). Britain’s 2016 Brexit vote to leave the European Union and the success of Italy’s right-wing Five Star Movement in 2018 have been widely viewed as a rejection of globalization (CNN, 2018; Elliott, 2018). In all three of these cases, and many more besides, leaders broadly identified as nationalists have condemned globalization. Globalization thus sounds a bit like the opposite of nationalism.

However, we should consider that globalization and nationalism, rather than being opposites, are two parts of the same phenomenon. As this chapter has shown, although the processes of globalization have speeded up in the past half century, the modern era of globalization has roots dating back to at least the 15th century. Globalization began in a world of competing kingdoms and empires.

The modern nation-state and the concept of nationalism developed in the 19th century, within the context of globalization. However, globalization soon became a project of nation-states. This was expressed in terms of both economic trade and political empire. For example, the British nation-state and British identity grew as industrialization boomed. Industrialization required raw materials that had to be acquired through global trade, and in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the security of this trade was believed to depend on Britain’s extensive colonial empire. Britons pointed with pride to the fact that the sun never set on the British Empire. Globalization built the nation.

Throughout the 20th century, the centers of world industry, finance, and banking remained in Western Europe and North America. American and European industrial exports dominated world trade. However, by the end of the century, the balance of world trade was beginning to shift. Until the 1960s, the world's largest economies were the United States, the Soviet Union, West Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. However, by the end of the century, Japan had become the world's second-largest economy. By 2010, it had been surpassed by China. India, which in the 1960s and 1970s was almost synonymous with poverty, had by 2016 become the world's seventh-largest economy (Armstrong 2022).

This change in the economic position of countries was accompanied by political changes as well. The colonial empires that had aided and sustained nationalism in Western Europe collapsed after World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union competed to extend and consolidate their spheres of interest throughout the Cold War. In the 21st century, however, it is the newly rising economies, particularly China, that have been expanding their political dominion. In 2013, China's "one belt, one road" initiative was instituted to create a network of roads, transportation corridors, and shipping lanes anchored in China and stretching through the countries of South, Southeast, and Central Asia; the Middle East; and northern Europe. When completed, China's belt and road system will reach about 65% of the world's population and could carry a third of all the goods and services produced in the world. Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are not part of the project, but China has expanded its economic and political influence in these places as well.

Clearly, globalization is an ongoing process. However, political and economic centers are shifting rapidly. As the balance of power moves away from the United States and northern Europe, people in these places are viewing globalization in increasingly negative terms and seeing it as a force opposed to nationalism. A 2016 YouGov.com poll showed that globalization was least popular in France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. At the same time, people in Asia understand globalization as contributing to nationalism. The poll found globalization was most popular in East and Southeast Asia, where over 70% said that it had been “a force for good” (M. Smith, 2016). The popularity of globalization in poorer economies and skepticism of it in wealthier ones continued in the 2018 and 2020 polls. Current political leaders in the United States and Western Europe rail against globalization and claim they will negotiate better trade deals. However, in 2017, China’s nationalist leader, Xi Jinping, called globalization an “irreversible historical trend” (Hsueh, 2017), and the nationalist Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, has said that threats to globalization are as dangerous as global warming or terrorism (Horner et al., 2018).

Globalization is probably here to stay, but there is no doubt that people in wealthy nations are having second thoughts. Barriers to trade are increasing, and world trade relative to global gross domestic product is falling (Law, 2021). The economic displacements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the war in Ukraine made people question the value of some international connections and reinforced the need for a strong domestic economy. This is heightened by the increasing division of the world into autocratic and nonautocratic societies. Starting in the 1970s, politicians and economists in Europe and the United States argued that economic engagement with China and other autocratic societies would lead to the spread of democratic institutions. This belief was reinforced by the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, since the early 2000s, the movement has been in the opposite direction. Autocracies have increased both in number and in economic power. Tensions between China and the United States have steadily increased. Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine ruptured a high percentage of global ties with that nation. Globalization will continue and perhaps increase, but we may be seeing the early stages of two somewhat separate spheres of globalization: a Chinese and autocratic sphere and a European and American more democratic sphere.

Key Questions

1. Are there parallels between today’s wealthy nations in Europe and North America and the 19th-century colonies of these same

nations? If so, what are they?

2. Do you believe that policies promoting economic nationalism are likely to affect the pace of globalization?
3. Must the economic ascent of nations such as China and India come at the price of decline in Europe and North America, or is it possible for economic conditions to simultaneously improve in all nations?

SUMMARY

1. To what degree is the current geographical distribution of wealth and power in the world today similar to what it was 1,000 years ago? Although we are aware of history, we tend to think of current world conditions as similar to past conditions. This is incorrect. The world as we see it is the result of historical processes that have moved wealth and power from one area to another. Places that are impoverished today were in many cases wealthy 1,000 years ago.
2. What was the condition of Europe in the 15th century? In the 15th century, Europe was neither wealthy nor technologically advanced. The centers of world power lay primarily in the Middle East and Asia. However, Europe was poised on the brink of a great expansion.
3. What were the primary motivations for European expansion? A combination of religious faith, greed, new social arrangements, and new technologies drove European expansion.
4. In what parts of the world were Europeans most successful at capturing and controlling new lands and why? Europeans were most successful in controlling lands in the Americas. This was because Native Americans lacked resistance to European diseases. As a result, these indigenous societies were depopulated and succumbed to European military pressure.
5. What were the key mechanisms Europeans used to make their control of foreign territories financially lucrative? The plunder of precious metals, the use of slave labor on monocultural plantations, and the joint stock company were all instrumental in

creating wealth for Europeans. Additionally, military and diplomatic maneuvering helped funnel wealth from around the world into Europe.

6. What roles have art and artifacts played in colonialism and the expansion of European and North American power? In the “Anthropology Makes a Difference” section, we explored the role of artifacts and museums in this process. The theft of art and artifacts often accompanied expansion. Art and artifacts are held in both museums and private collections. In museums, they often contribute to ideas of national power. Nations and native peoples have demanded the return of property they consider stolen. In the United States and elsewhere, laws have required the return of some of this property. Anthropologists have often helped cultures regain their lost objects.
7. What was colonialism and when did it happen? Colonialism is the active possession of foreign territory and the maintenance of political dominance over that territory. The Americas were first colonized in the 16th century. However, elsewhere in the world, colonization did not happen until the 19th century.
8. Why did Europeans colonize regions in the 19th century and how did they justify taking colonial possessions? Europeans colonized because of the collapse of earlier mercantilist firms or to protect their national companies from competition from other Europeans. They wished to increase their wealth and protect their trade. They justified colonialism by calling it a “civilizing mission.”
9. What specific methods did Europeans use to control and extract wealth from their colonies? Europeans pressed colonial subjects into forced labor on roads and other projects. They used taxes (to be paid in colonial money) to fund the government and force natives to participate in the European-dominated cash economy. They used education programs to discredit local culture and create a class of people who could help with the colonial administration.
10. What was the Tirailleurs Sénégalais and what was its political role? In the Ethnography, we investigated the Tirailleurs Sénégalais, an army regiment the French recruited and drafted from their West African colonies. In the 19th century, the

Tirailleurs Sénégalais helped the French conquer additional colonies, and in the 20th century, the regiment fought in France’s wars, including World Wars I and II. These soldiers also played an important role in ending colonialism in West Africa.

11. What was the role of anthropology in colonialism? Anthropological knowledge was sometimes used in the process of colonialism, and some anthropologists sought to make themselves useful to colonial governments. However, anthropology did not come into being to promote colonialism, which would have gone on with or without it.
12. When did the colonies taken in the 19th century gain their independence and what key factors were responsible for this? Most colonies gained their independence between the end of World War II and 1965. Civil unrest in the colonies, the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers, and changes in the structure of international economics all played critical roles in the timing of independence.
13. What is the relationship between globalization and nationalism in the current-day world? In “The Global and the Local” section, we examined the connections between globalization and nationalism. Economic powers that perceive themselves as strong and growing tend to see globalization as a key force that helps build the nation, and these powers promote globalization as part of nationalism. Economic powers that perceive themselves in relative decline tend to view globalization as a threat. In these places, globalization appears as the opposite of nationalism.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. The brief historical description in this chapter may be very different from what you were taught in high school and some college classes. What are the differences and how can they be explained?
2. This chapter examines the role of exploration, invasion, and conquest in Europe’s rise to power. However,

European society was also a source of great innovation. What is the relationship between European expansionism and European innovation?

3. Explain the importance of the idea of a “civilizing mission” to both people living under colonialism and people in the colonizing countries.
4. By modern standards, many injustices were committed on the path that today’s wealthy nations took to power. Do these past injustices demand compensation by current-day people? Does history impose obligations on today’s wealthy nations?

Key Terms

civilizing mission (p. 439)

colonialism (p. 435)

colonies (p. 435)

corvée labor (p. 440)

Dutch East India Company (p. 433)

joint stock company (p. 433)

monoculture plantations (p. 432)

Pillage (p. 429)

Tirailleurs Sénégalais (p. 442)

Notes

1. It is impossible to calculate the value of the wealth pillaged from the Americas. If we simply use the current value of the weight of precious metal, the number would be about $40 billion. However, this greatly understates the value. $40 billion is not a lot in today's economy. However, the world economy of the 16th century was very small compared to today. So much gold and silver came into Europe from the Americas that the European economy was fundamentally altered. Economic historians refer to this period as the "price revolution" (Fisher, 1989).

2. We can see how this works using the example of covid. If covid attacks a small population, in a relatively short time, everyone is exposed to it. The result is that some people die, others survive but now have at least short-term immunity against future infection. If the disease has no hosts to infect, it will disappear. Unfortunately, covid exists in a world where all populations are connected so there are always new people to infect. Therefore, instead of the disease disappearing, we experience waves of infection: When a new form of covid appears in a community, numbers of people infected with it rapidly increase and then decline.

3. The 1899 Kipling poem from which this famous line is taken neatly captures the way the colonialism was sold to the British public. However, it is worth noting that the intended audience for the poem was American. The full title of the poem was "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands." In it, Kipling is exhorting Americans to colonize in the same way as the British. And the United States did so. The Philippines was a U.S. colony from 1898 to 1946.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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The top diagram includes the cross-section of the ship with slaves crammed into the hold except for the store room. The text above the diagram reads "PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF

292 SLAVES; 130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES.”

The bottom diagram shows the cross-section of the ship with the middle portion divided into three sections, from left to right they are labeled “WOMEN,” “BOYS,” and “MEN” with slaves stowed around the wings of the ship. The text above the diagram reads “PLAN SHOWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES (IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH). THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES BETWEEN THE BEAMS AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS.”

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The map shows eight political divisions and modern-day boundaries. The divisions are Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Independent. The majority of the regions were colonized by France followed by Britain, and Germany.

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The Tirailleurs Sénégalais recruiting areas include MALI, NIGER, BENIN, BURKINA FASO, GUINEA, OUAHIGOUYA, BOUGONI, CÔTE D’IVOIRE, and SENEGAL. Other states which lie around the recruiting area and marked on the map are MAURITANIA, ALGERIA, CHAD, NIGERIA, CAMEROON, GHANA, TOGO, LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE, and GUINEA- BISSAU.

16 ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: UNDERSTANDING AND ACTING IN A CHALLENGING WORLD

SAIGON.
Phở

iStockphoto.com/Andrey Rykov

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the successes and failures of attempts to eliminate poverty between the end of World War II and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.
2. Distinguish how poverty, violence, and governmental instability continue to be important forces in the world
3. Assess the role of multinational corporations in the world and explain their relationship to the conditions of workers, gender relations, and cultural standardization.
4. Summarize the role and importance of urbanization in the world and how some cities change culture.
5. Evaluate the significance of population growth and the effects of government policy and economics in controlling population growth.
6. Examine the role of indigenous people in modern-day nations and the challenges that confront them.
7. Discuss some of the key environmental challenges facing the world and the differences between pollution in wealthy and poor nations.
8. Explain the ways that anthropology can play a critical role in evaluating and finding solutions to problems that face the world.

As imperialist powers gave up their colonies in the two decades after World War II, new nations emerged into a profoundly unsettled world. The decline of the European powers and Japan was counterbalanced by the increasing importance of the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The period between the end of World War II and 1989 is often referred to as the Cold War. It was given this name because mass armed conflict did not erupt in Europe and U.S.

and Soviet troops did not clash directly. However, it is critical to remember that the war was only “cold” in Europe. The United States, the Soviet Union, and their allies engaged both directly and indirectly in intense armed conflicts in other regions around the world. Millions of lives were lost.

The number of these wars increased steadily from the 1950s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. For example, between 1965 and 1978, more than 50 wars broke out, and more than 30 of these involved the direct participation of troops from another country (Kende, 1979). In most cases, wars were fought for reasons that were not directly related to the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, in almost every case, warring parties engaged with the United States and its allies or the Soviet Union and its allies. Both sides used each other. Warring parties pursuing their own goals looked to the United States and the Soviet Union for money, weaponry, and troops. The United States and the Soviet Union understood conflict around the world in terms of their own global strategies. This led to enormous violence and bloodshed. In 1970, the most violent year of this period, there were almost 380,000 battlefield deaths (Roser, 2018). It is difficult to assess the number of civilian deaths, but it was almost certainly much higher (Roberts, 2010).

In addition to this violence, in the 1950s and 1960s, most of the world was deeply impoverished. Bourguignon and Morrison (2002) estimated that in 1960, almost two-thirds of the total world population lived in poverty. The majority of these individuals were living in extreme poverty, defined as an income of less than $1 a day. In the United States, more than one in five were poor (Morrill, 2015). In China, the Great Famine of 1959–1961 led to tens of millions of starvation deaths (Lim, 2012). Vast numbers of extremely poor people lived in the formerly colonized nations of Africa and Asia and Latin America.

Colonization was aimed at bringing raw materials and wealth to the colonizing nations, not at creating prosperity among the colonized. However, newly independent nations needed to return benefits to their people. New governments could only be stable if their citizens were prosperous. But this legitimate desire for prosperity also fed into great power rivalries. The United States, the Soviet Union, and allies of these two nations offered technical advice and development aid to impoverished nations around the world in return for political and military support.

The United States and its European allies wanted to create wealth and prosperity in nations throughout the world. But they also wanted to tie the economic and political systems of the nations they aided to their own. Had this worked, it might have been a mutually beneficial arrangement. However, it was largely both a political and an economic failure.

Aid planners in wealthy nations tried numerous approaches to assisting the economies of poor nations. In the 1950s, believing that urban development would spread to rural areas, they encouraged the movement of people to cities. The 1960s were dominated by **modernization theory**. W. W. Rostow, the theory's greatest proponent, proposed that investments in infrastructure such as roads and railways would create the "preconditions for growth" and then the "takeoff" to "the age of high mass consumption" (Rostow, 1960). In the 1970s, development efforts focused on providing basic human necessities such as clean water and literacy to the world's poorest people. In the 1980s, the focus changed to forcing poor nations to open their markets to free trade, get rid of state-owned companies, and reduce social services, a tactic that wealthy nations called "**structural adjustment**." For the most part, these programs did not work, and they often fed government corruption. And although they benefited at least some people, for most people in poor nations living conditions in the 1980s were as bad or worse as they had been in the 1950s.

The failure of foreign aid was part of the larger failure of governments to bring prosperity or provide for the needs of their people. This led to chronic instability. In Africa alone, between 1960 and 1982, there were 52 successful military takeovers, 56 unsuccessful attempts, and more than 100 coup plots. By 1982, 84% of African nations had experienced some form of military intervention (Johnson et al., 1984).

It’s important to note that not all attempts at foreign aid were failures. The most successful were probably medical campaigns. In the 20th century, smallpox killed 300 million people around the world. In the 1960s, it was the cause of 10 to 15 million deaths annually. However, in 1967, the World Health Organization launched a systematic international vaccination campaign (Figure 16.1), and by 1977 naturally occurring smallpox had been completely eliminated (Flight, 2017). Vaccination campaigns against polio have been almost as effective, reducing disease rates by 99 percent (World Health Organization, 2017). There have been stunning successes against other diseases as well. In 1986, there were 3.5 million cases of Guinea worm, a horrific waterborne parasite, but the illness has been virtually eliminated today. Enormous progress has also been made against measles, mumps, rubella, river blindness, and lymphatic filariasis (Breene, 2017). Major successes in the fight against HIV/AIDS have been achieved as well. In the 21 most affected African nations, new HIV infections among children dropped 70% between 2009 and 2015 (UAIDS, 2016). It is very hard to overstate the importance of these successes. Literally billions of people are now free of the fear of diseases that were once a basic aspect of their lives.

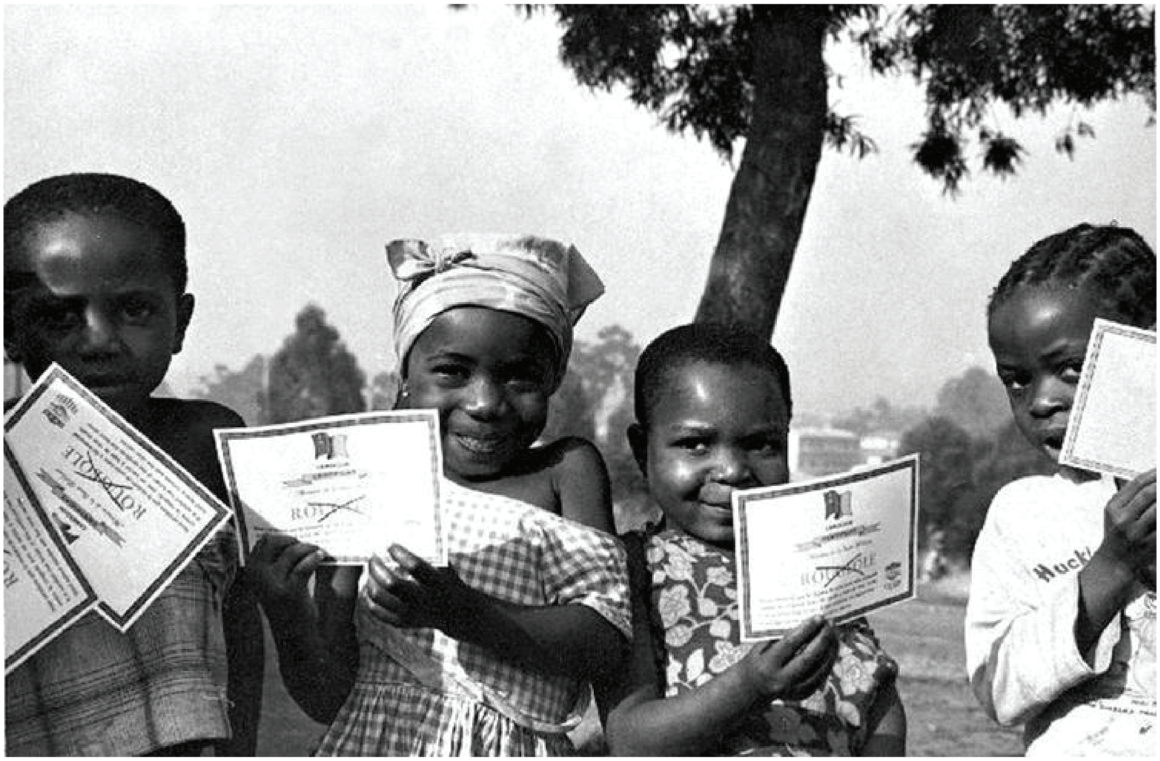


Figure 16.1 In the 1960s, Smallpox killed 10 to 15 million people annually, but by 1977 naturally occurring smallpox had been completely eliminated. Here, children in Cameroon in 1975 hold certificates that show they have been vaccinated against smallpox.

Smith Collection/Gado/Getty Images

There have been successes in other areas as well. Aid agencies such as the World Food Program, CARE, Oxfam, the Red Cross, and Crescent have provided critical emergency relief to the victims of violence and ecological disasters. Microfinance organizations such as the Grameen Bank have made loans that helped people survive difficult times or start small businesses. American Peace Corps volunteers have improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. These organizations and others continue to work in impoverished communities around the world. Although they have not ended global poverty, their ability to help individuals and communities has been proven by over a half century of experience.

THE CHANGING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The nature of the global economy began to change dramatically in the 1990s. A series of trends converged that has made life almost everywhere very different today from what it was in the 1980s. Among the most important of these events were the collapse of the Soviet Union, political and economic changes in China and India, and changes in global shipping, transportation, and communication. In addition, almost everyone in the world has been profoundly affected by the development of more and more powerful digital technologies.

The end of the Soviet Union in 1991 had almost immediate effects. In some cases, it led to disaster. For example, it was a key element in the collapse of Yugoslavia and the ensuing violence in that region (explored in Chapter 7, pages xxx). Perhaps the worst events happened in Central Africa, where the end of the Cold War was implicated in the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi people in Rwanda and the ensuing war that spilled over into the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (Destexhe, 1995; Prunier, 1995). By the early 2000s, these wars had killed more than 5.4 million. Although the level of violence has diminished since then, people continue to die. The United Nations reported 3,000 civilian deaths in 2020 (Africanews, 2021)[2]. In early 2022 CODECO, a violent militia in the Democratic Republic of Congo was involved in numerous attacks that killed dozens (Aljazeera, 2022; UN, 2022)[3].

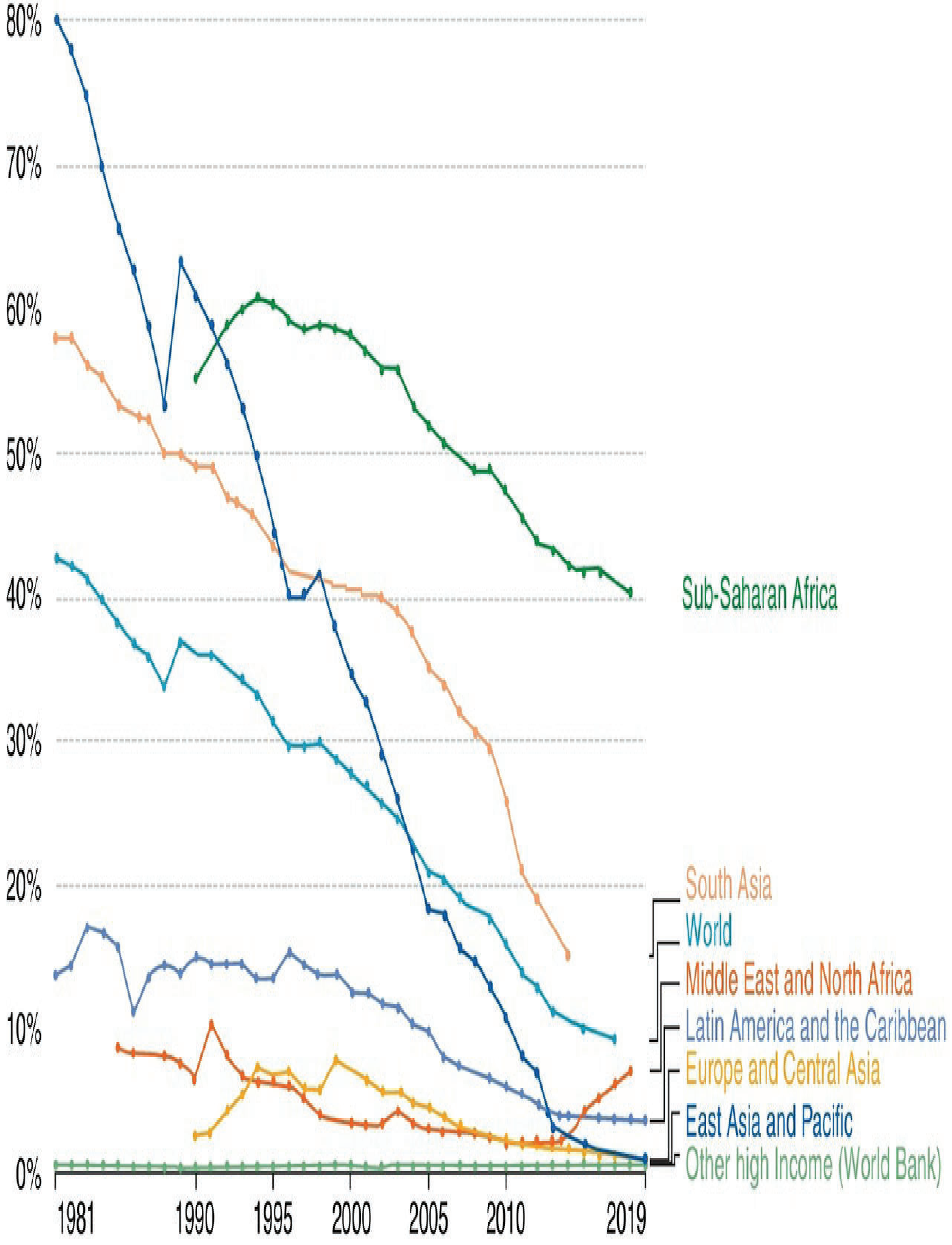
However, in many places, particularly in Africa and Latin America, wars that had been fueled by weaponry and money from the United States and the Soviet Union ended virtually overnight. By 1996, annual worldwide battlefield deaths had fallen to under 50,000 (Roser, 2018), less than one-seventh of what they were in 1970. Government-sponsored foreign aid, both humanitarian and military, diminished, rapidly shifting from 2 percent of the federal budget in 1985 to 0.7 percent in 1997 (NYT, 2011). At the same time, political and economic changes in China and India encouraged both the development of capitalist enterprises in these nations and the expansion of multinational corporations. Two billion people—roughly one-third of the world's population— were integrated more firmly into the global economic system.

New technologies were also altering the nature of commerce and communication. One of the most important of these was the development of containerized shipping. Everyone today is familiar with shipping containers; however, they are a relatively recent innovation and have only been widely used since the 1980s. Today, about 20 million containers carried by 5,434 ships are in transit at any given time (George, 2013; Statistica, 2021)[4]. The result has been an extraordinary reduction in the cost of shipping. For example, by 2009, it was cheaper to ship cod caught off the coast of Scotland to Asia to be processed and back again to Scotland to be sold than it was simply to have it processed in Scotland ("Scotland to China," 2009). Or consider the iPhone. One shipping container can hold about 44,000 of them. It costs about $3,000 to send a shipping container from China to the United States (Petersen, 2015). So, the international shipping cost of an iPhone works out to about seven cents! This means that for many items, the cost difference between shipping them 10 miles or 10,000 miles is negligible, and production can take place anywhere in the world.

The cost of moving people has also declined, and the number of people traveling has greatly increased. In 1974, the least expensive round-trip ticket from New York to Los Angeles was about $250 (around $1,340 in 2018 dollars). In 2018, the least expensive round-trip ticket for the same flight was between $100 and $200 (in 2018 dollars). In 1960, air travel was rare—the preserve of elite "jet-setters." By 1990, about 1 billion passengers flew each year. In 2017, that number had risen to about 4 billion (Statistica, 2018b). In 2016, almost 10,000 planes were carrying 1.25 million people in the air at any given time (Avakian, 2017). Air travel fell precipitously during the covid pandemic but by spring 2022 was recovering rapidly.

The declines in world poverty have been stunning (Figure 16.2).

According to the United Nations, the number of people around the world living in extreme poverty fell by 58% between 1990 and 2011. The **World Bank**, which uses a different measure, found an even greater decline: a 74% drop between 1990 and 2015. In 1981, about 44% of the world’s population lived in extreme poverty; by 2018, that number was about 10%[5]. Some of this progress was reversed by the covid pandemic. The World Bank estimated that more than additional 100 million people were pushed into poverty by the pandemic. It was the first global rise in poverty in more than 20 years[6].


80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
1981
1990
1995
2000
2005
2010
2019
Sub-Saharan Africa
South Asia
World
Middle East and North Africa
Latin America and the Caribbean
Europe and Central Asia
East Asia and Pacific
Other high Income (World Bank)

Description

Figure 16.2 The share of the population living in extreme poverty has fallen around the world. The chart shows this change by world region between 1981 and 2019.

Source: Joe Hasell, Max Roser, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Pablo Arriagada (2022) - “Poverty”. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: 'https://ourworldindata.org/poverty' [Online Resource]

Until the pandemic, the rise from poverty was happening even though the world’s population increased by two-thirds during this period. Through this period, the rate of economic growth greatly exceeded the rate of population growth. At the same time, the global middle class has expanded. According to Homi Kharas of the Brookings Institution, in 2016 the global middle class included about 3.2 billion people, and he estimated that by 2020, most of the world’s population would be members. The pandemic prevented this from happening. A 2021 analysis conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that the global middle class fell 54 million people short of earlier projections (Kochhar, 2021). Although the world economy was recovering by 2021, pandemic related disruptions are far from over and although things have improved greatly from earlier decades, the current picture is considerably less optimistic than it was before the pandemic.

THE PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY AND INSTABILITY

The movement of so many people out of extreme poverty and the expansion of the global middle class is an amazing achievement. It might mark a critical moment—a turning point in human history. However, there are numerous reasons to temper our enthusiasm. Although virtually all analysts agree that poverty has been greatly reduced, not all are as optimistic as the United Nations and World Bank. Estimates of the numbers of people remaining in extreme poverty range from a low of about 750 million to a high of 1.6 billion (Qiu, 2016). And vast numbers of individuals, though no longer extremely poor, still contend with great economic insecurity. Further, prosperity is not evenly distributed. Poverty has decreased fastest in Asia and the Pacific. It has changed far more slowly in other areas of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 40% of the population remains extremely poor (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018).

Indeed, economic inequality is a growing problem throughout the world. Income inequality varies greatly across nations. It is lowest in Europe and China and highest in Brazil, India, and the Middle East. Inequality has grown rapidly in the United States, China, Russia, and India and more slowly in Europe. However, almost every nation is becoming more unequal. The global economy has grown, improving the life chances of most people. However, the global top 1% has captured twice as much of this growth as the bottom 50% (Alverado et al., 2018).

In addition, many places in the world remain violent. In the spring of 2022, hostile armies faced each other across national borders in India and Pakistan, North and South Korea, and several other places. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked the first warfare of its kind in Europe since the end of World War II. By mid-March 2022, more than 20 percent of Ukraine's population had been displaced including 6.5 million who fled their homes but remained in Ukraine and 4.3 million who fled the nation.[7] The war had economic and social impacts worldwide as Ukrainian food exports plummeted, nations in Europe and the Americas cut ties with Russia, and patterns of energy consumption changed.

Civil wars are ongoing in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Criminal violence plagues numerous countries in Central America. Religious violence and terror persist in many places. It is worth noting, however, that except for the Middle East, violence declined in every area of the world from the late 2000s to the late 2010s, The Institute for Economics and Peace reported that between 2009 and 2020, 77 percent of countries improved attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peace. However, overall, the level of global peacefulness has deteriorated since 2009 and only 14 countries had very high levels of peace[8]. Violence, instability, and poverty are related issues. Many of the most violent places in the world are also among the poorest.

Migration

Violence, poverty, and instability continue to lead to widespread migration of people whose lives are in danger and those hoping to find better futures for themselves and their families. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported that in mid 2021, there were more than 84 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of these, 48 million were displaced within their own country. More than 26 million were refugees, and more than 4 million asylum seekers[9]. This was before the Ukraine war, which has added more than 6 million internally displaced persons and more than 4 million refugees (Figure 16.3).

Figure 16.3 Migrants and refugees take enormous risks to flee conditions of poverty and violence. Here, two refugees rescued from the Mediterranean Sea between Libya and Italy, one of the world's most dangerous crossings, are wrapped in foil emergency blankets.

DIMITAR DILKOFF/AFP via Getty Images

Violence and poverty have led people to undertake extraordinarily dangerous journeys for a chance at safety and a better life. From 2015 to the end of 2021, more than 2.07 million migrants and refugees traveled to Europe via the Mediterranean. An additional 19,000 died or are missing after attempting the crossing[10]. Migrants also face the possibility of being raped, enslaved, or murdered by those who transport them (Sherlock & Al-Arian, 2018). In just one of many instances, 39 people from Vietnam were found dead in a sealed truck in England in October 2019 (Schaverien, 2019).

Between October 2020 and the end of September 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported more than 1.6 million encounters with migrants, the largest number ever recorded. More than 450,000 of these were with family units. An additional 144,000 were with unaccompanied children. More than one million of the encounters were with people from countries other than Mexico. Most of those were people from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America but there were also encounters with people from many other countries (Gramlich & Noe-Bustamante, 2019). In fiscal year 2022, more than 850 people died trying to cross the U.S. Mexican border, more than in any other year since 2014 when the United Nations International Organization for Migration began documenting these deaths.[11]

Migrants come to new nations to escape violence and poverty, but they frequently face discrimination in the places they settle. They are often able to increase their wealth, but this may come at the price of decreasing their social status (Haines, 2007, p. 62). Isolation and alienation have led to unrest in immigrant communities in Europe, particularly among Africans and Muslims.

Illegal immigrants are in a particularly weak position. Their status makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Further, although host countries may create programs to attract migrants in times of economic prosperity, in hard economic times they frequently turn against migrants. As we saw in Chapter 7 on political organization, although economic data show that migrants contribute substantially to their new countries, they are often political targets. Increasing migration is among the most frequently cited causes of the rise of nationalist populism.

When migrants leave their home communities, they deprive those communities of their skills and labor. It is difficult to convince people to remain in poor, unstable countries when the salaries paid for their skills may be 30 or more times higher in wealthy nations. However, this migration may be the key to improving conditions in the regions left behind. Migrants provide their communities of origin with contact with the rest of the world, creating a broad network of support for community members. People in seemingly isolated villages often have connections with family and friends throughout the world. These connections bring information, ideas, products, and, perhaps most importantly, money. In 2020, the total humanitarian aid from all national governments worldwide was about $30 billion, and the amount of non-covid related aid fell from previous years[12]. However, that same year, migrants sent $540 billion to people in their home countries[13]. India alone received $83 billion[14]. In 14 nations, in 2020, remittances (money sent home by migrants) constitute at least twenty percent of the economy. For example, in Tonga, remittances are almost 39 percent of GDP, in El Salvador, they are 24 percent of GDP, and in Jamaica 22 percent[15].

Anthropology Makes a Difference

Development Anthropology.

In the second half of the 20th century, wealthy nations and newly independent poor nations turned their attention to the eradication of poverty. Early efforts based on modernization theory concentrated on large-scale infrastructure projects: the building of roads, dams, and power plants. However, by the 1970s, it was clear that such construction projects were having little effect on the deeply entrenched problems of poverty. In response, major development organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations moved toward a **basic human needs approach**. This meant turning their focus to projects aimed more directly at improving the welfare of the poor, particularly in rural areas.

Few anthropologists had been involved in the modernization approaches to development. However, the basic human needs approach required providing services to the sorts of small rural communities that anthropologists often studied. Governmental aid agencies did not know how to operate in such communities and looked to anthropologists for expertise. Anthropologists were often deeply sympathetic to the people that basic human needs projects aimed to help and saw such projects as beneficial. Thus, anthropologists were drawn into development both by the needs of governments and their own desire to serve communities. This conjuncture of interests gave birth to a new specialty: development anthropology. Anthropologists drawn to development anthropology viewed economic development as both desirable and, in the long run, inevitable.

In 1974, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) employed one full-time anthropologist; by 1980, it employed more than 50 (Escobar, 1997). Development anthropologists trained to act as culture brokers—intermediaries between development organizations and the recipients of aid. Due to their interest in the local aspects of globalization, their ethnographically based knowledge of remote communities, and their ability to provide cogent analysis and assessment, they made important contributions to development projects.

Jim Yong Kim was president of the World Bank from 2012 to 2019. He is a medical anthropologist, global health expert, and cofounder with Paul Farmer (1959-2022) of Partners In Health, a charitable agency that focuses on improving health care delivery systems in the poorest nations. Responding to criticism that the World Bank prioritizes Western cultural solutions and marginalizes local cultural approaches to development, Kim emphasizes an anthropological approach that “amplifies the voices of developing countries and draws on the expertise and experience of the people we serve” (World Bank, 2012).

Although Kim’s public health projects have saved many lives, he neither opposed nor called into question the neoliberal economic policies and structures that impede solutions to improving health among the very poorest countries. And herein lies the tension in development anthropology: While most anthropologists favor development aid, some note that development may reinforce the structures of inequality that create poverty in the first place, and they call for programs that empower the oppressed (see Crush, 1995; Pigg, 2001).

Anthropologists today seem more actively engaged in the intellectual critique and analysis of economic development than they are in participating in it. For example, Patrick Neveling, using examples from Lesotho and Mauritius gives us an analysis that places development in its historical context as a category of practice that “maintains or amends long-existing practices of capitalist accumulation and is central to how global, national, and local political economies change” (2015, p. 180). Neveling’s account is very helpful for scholars who wish to understand the context and practice of development. But it is also true that both humanitarian aid projects and economic development projects continue. For example, in spring 2022, the World Bank listed 2,985 active projects around the world. These included a $40 million project to enhance skill development and employment services for youth in Laos, $200 million to reduce regional learning disparities for girls in primary schools in Kenya, and $80 million to improve pedagogical and management practices in Columbia, and many, many others. Governments and nonprofit organizations operate thousands more around the world. These projects will take place with or without input from anthropologists.

Anthropologists can play important roles in the planning of development. Mari H. Clarke (2000) notes that economists and development planners often assume that all people think alike and respond to the same incentives. Anthropologists, on the other hand, think in terms of understanding the entire system rather than single elements of it. They look for links between different facets of society that others may miss. Anthropologists try to understand local people's perceptions of the world and access their knowledge, a process that makes for better project designs. Given this, it is probably good for anthropologists to participate in development projects rather than simply analyzing and critiquing them (though this is also valuable).

The websites of large governmental development organizations such as the World Bank (www.worldbank.org), the U.S. Agency for International Development (www.usaid.gov), and the United Nations (www.un.org) contain an enormous wealth of information about development projects. Volunteer opportunities also abound on the Web. The Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov) maintains an extensive and highly informative website as well.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

A business that owns enterprises and seeks to market its goods and services in more than one nation is known as a **multinational corporation** (MNC). MNCs provide employment opportunities as well as goods and services to people who otherwise would not have them. They have clearly played an important role in creating the rising global middle class. At the same time, they are the source of major and controversial changes in the natural, economic, social, and cultural environments.

Because MNCs control vast amounts of wealth, they are significant political forces throughout the world. They are private companies, but they can have enormous effects on politics and culture. For example, in the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009, the problems of multinational financial corporations threatened the global economy. Wealthy nations discovered that, even though MNCs played a critical role in creating the crisis, some MNCs were too big to let fail. Governments were forced to provide public funding for them or risk devastating economic consequences. Even so, the effects of the corporate decline and failure reverberated around the world, leading to job losses, bankruptcy, migration, and culture change in many places.

Poor nations are particularly vulnerable to MNCs. No corporation controls more than a small percentage of the economy of any rich nation. But many MNCs have yearly budgets that are greater than those of the governments of poor nations. For example, in 2021, each of the world’s 10 largest companies had a gross revenue of more than $260 billion, more than the total value of the economy (the GDP) of all but 44 of the countries tracked by the World Bank[16]. In 2021, Apple made a gross profit of about $162 billion[17], almost 100 times the size of the total economy of Belize[18]. In 2018, online retail giant Amazon searched for a new corporate headquarters. U.S. cities competed to be selected, and some offered substantial financial incentives. Montgomery County in Maryland offered the most—over $8.5 billion in tax rebates and infrastructure and transportation improvements (Garfield, 2018). The financial power of large MNCs allows them to exert enormous influence and makes it extremely difficult for nations to regulate them.

MNCs are also problematic because, like all capitalist corporations, and like the historic trading companies described in the previous chapter, their fundamental goal is to return wealth to their shareholders, the vast majority of whom are already wealthy. MNCs employ people throughout the world and provide goods and services to them. In so doing, they usually improve people's standards of living. However, they also redistribute wealth from their workers and customers, most of whom have relatively little money, to corporate shareholders, most of whom have much more. Thus, they are generators of inequality. Through their actions, wealth moves from the relatively poor to the relatively rich.

Multinational Corporations: Sweatshop Labor

Low costs of transportation enable MNCs to locate their production facilities in the places that are least expensive for them. Since labor is often a major component of the cost of production, MNCs seek places where labor is extremely inexpensive. In many cases, production is outsourced to other corporations that employ people under sweatshop conditions. **Sweatshops** are factories where workers, often women and children, are employed for long hours under difficult conditions at low pay. South and East Asia—a sweatshop belt, which includes China, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh—accounts for about one-fourth of the global economy. Not all production in South and East Asia is sweatshop labor, however, and sweatshops exist in many other countries, including the United States.

Much sweatshop production is funneled into the United States in the form of cheap consumer goods. Major brands such as Walmart, Gap, Marks & Spencer (a popular British store), H&M, Adidas, Nike, and many others produce clothing and consumer products under sweatshop conditions. In 2016, for example, more than 500 workers in Cambodian factories making Nike, Asics, and Puma products were hospitalized after collapsing on the job. That so many workers would collapse is not surprising since temperatures in these factories frequently rise to almost 100 degrees (McVeigh, 2017). Nike in particular has faced repeated criticism over its use of sweatshop labor. In 1998, the company committed to changing its policies, but in 2017 it was again under fire for its practices, which included contracting with factories that verbally abused their workers, stole wages from workers, and fired those who participated in organizing unions (Bain, 2017). In 2020, Vicky Xiuzhong Xu and her colleagues at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute charged that China transported at least 80,000 Uighur citizens to factories where they were forced to work. In January 2020, 600 were at a factory equipped with watchtowers inward facing fences topped with razor wire, making shoes for Nike, but Xu and Liebold report that 83 other brands also used Uighur forced labor[19].

Sweatshops have been the scenes of frequent disasters. The largest of these occurred on April 24, 2013, when Rana Plaza, a commercial building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed, killing 1,134 and injuring at least 2,500 (Figure 16.4). The building housed several factories where workers, mainly women and children, made clothing for Children's Place, J.C. Penney, Walmart, and other U.S. brands. In the wake of the disaster, several private and government agreements were made to improve worker safety. These included changes such as adding sprinkler systems and emergency exits. Those who signed the agreements were supposed to correct critical safety issues by 2018, but a report in February of that year showed that only about 3% of factories were fully in compliance and only 15% had implemented half of the required changes (Kashyap, 2018).

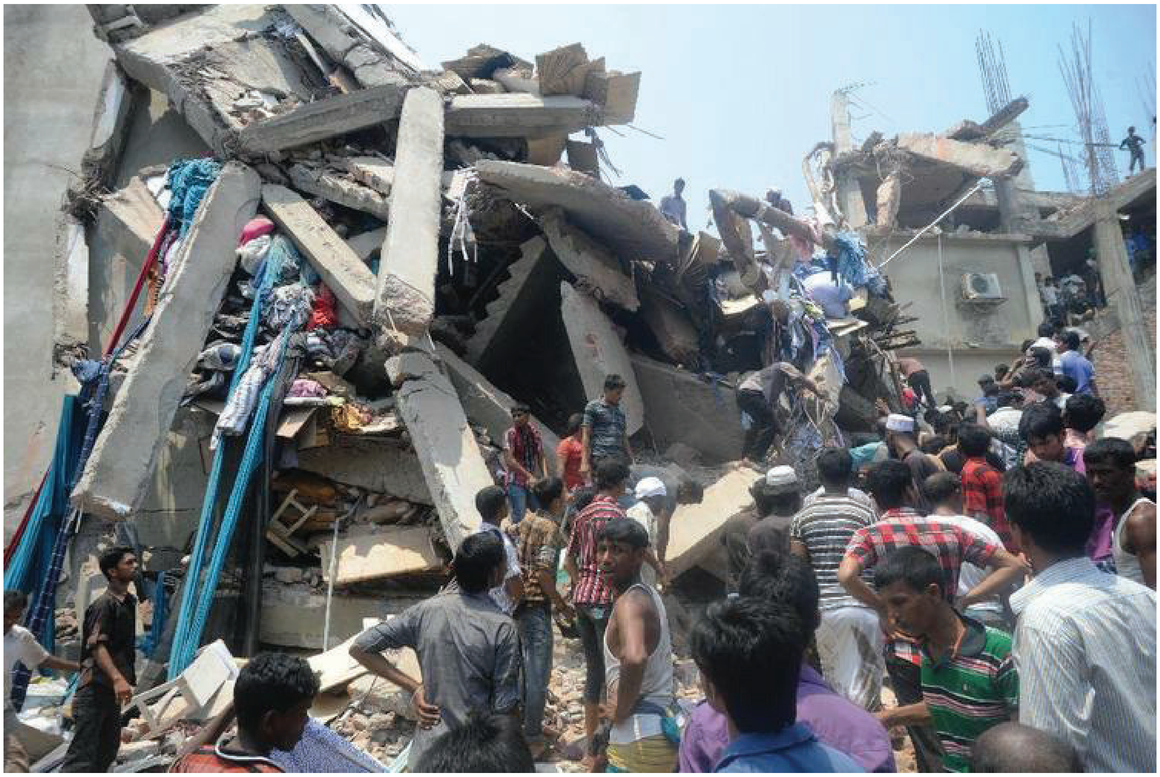


Figure 16.4 The worst sweatshop disaster in history occurred on April 24, 2013, when over 1,000 people making clothing for U.S. brands such as Walmart died in a building collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

SK Hasan Ali / Alamy Stock Photo

There is much debate over the role of sweatshops in the world economy[20]. There is no question that they keep prices low for consumers and profits high for corporations. However, the degree to which they provide benefits to their workers is disputed. On the one hand, people are often willing to work under terrible conditions because the alternatives are even worse. For the deeply impoverished, especially the landless poor, the money earned in factory work, even if it is inadequate, means the difference between food and a roof over their head or hunger on the streets. Furthermore, advocates argue that both conditions and wages tend to improve over time. For example, the 2022 minimum wage received by factory workers in Cambodia is $194 a month. It is less than is required to support a family of two adults and two children. However, it is far better than the $2.25 a day that agricultural laborers in Cambodia made in 2020[21].

However, in some cases, there are better alternatives to factory labor. In a study in Ethiopia, Christopher Blattman and Stefan Dercon (2017) followed almost 1,000 people who had applied for factory jobs. They found that those who did not get these jobs often ended up in market selling, agriculture, and construction, where they made about as much as those who did get factory jobs. Additionally, two-thirds of those who got factory jobs quit within a year.

Opponents of sweatshops argue that conditions in sweatshops are fundamentally dehumanizing and insist that governments should apply global standards to labor conditions. They point out that sweatshops were once common in the United States and other wealthy nations. It took strong government intervention to improve factory conditions, limit child labor, and impose minimum wages. Today's poor nations are often discouraged from taking the actions that enabled wealthy nations to restrict sweatshop labor and create a strong middle class (Rothstein, 2005).

As has been noted, sweatshops are not limited to poor nations today. The garment industry in Los Angeles employs about 45,000 workers, many under difficult conditions and at very low pay. A 2015 survey by the Garment Worker Center showed that more than 20% experienced on-the-job violence or harassment, almost half worked 10 hours a day or more without overtime, and, because they are paid by the piece rather than by the hour, more than half received less than the minimum wage (Garment Workers Center, 2015).

Politicians and pundits sometimes point to the sweatshops of multinational corporations as the cause of the economic decline in the United States. However, in 2021, the median hourly wage for an assembly line worker in the United States was $12[22]. Although this produces an annual income that is well below the national poverty line for a family of four, it is more than three times the average factory wage in China, and manufacturing wages in China are five times those in India (Yan, 2017). According to several polls, 70% to 75% of Americans say they would prefer to buy products made in the United States. However, the same polls say that only about 30% were willing to pay more for such products (Long, 2017).

MNCs: Platform Capitalism and the Surveillance State

About half of the world’s largest corporations are now platforms: digital marketplaces that allow different groups to interact and transact business. These companies include Alphabet (the parent company of Google), Amazon, Tencent, Facebook, Alibaba, and Baidu. As we saw in Chapter 8, platform companies are often able to reap the benefits of commerce without accepting liabilities. They also raise difficult questions about politics, control, and privacy.

Most platform companies create technologies that center on smartphones used by billions of people around the world. These technologies provide convenience, entertainment, and social connectivity to about 45 percent of the world’s total population (Tankovska, 2021). And this gives the companies that control the technology extraordinary power.

Part of the power of technology companies comes from their ability to facilitate communication. People benefit from staying in touch with old friends and finding others with similar interests. This is a particular boon for people who are socially or physically isolated. However, it also connects people who have antisocial or criminal interests. For example, in 2018, over 45 million videos and pictures of child sexual abuse were reported as having been circulated on the internet, and this is probably only a fraction of those that were available. Many of these were on the dark web, but major companies, including Facebook, Tumblr, Microsoft, Dropbox, and others, were also implicated in their storage and distribution (Keller & Dance, 2019). Additionally, as N. F. Johnson and his colleagues (2019) point out, the internet creates “dark pools” in which online hate flourishes.

Social media has also become a major engine driving political polarization. For social media companies, outrage is good for business. The angrier people are, the more time they spend reading and producing social media, the more ads can be directed at them, and the more profit generated from them. Platform companies like Facebook deny responsibility for the accuracy of the information they carry. Since disinformation often stokes outrage, these companies actively benefit from it. Disinformation and outrage spread by online trolls now play an important role in many elections in the United States. For example, an NBC News study found that in the 2016 elections, there were more than 200,000 tweets sent by accounts directly linked to the Russian government, and these were retweeted more than 2 million times (Popkin, 2017).

The level of surveillance that platform capitalist companies create is also deeply concerning. Minute by minute, cell phones track their users' locations. Click by click, companies monitor users’ interests, political preferences, purchases, and desires. The data is unprecedented, both in scale and scope. It allows companies, political campaigns, and others access to the fine detail and intimate aspects of virtually everyone’s life. This is particularly concerning because everywhere in the world there are close linkages between governments and technology companies. These are extraordinarily close in China where many of the world’s most powerful technology companies are based, including Alibaba, Huawei, Tencent, Baidu, JD.com, and others. Technology and social media have sometimes played important roles in protest movements, recently in Hong Kong in 2019. However, their current and potential use in propaganda, political manipulation, and political control is probably far greater.

Multi-National Corporations: McDonaldization

Anthropologists are interested in the ways MNCs are changing social structures and cultural ideals. Although MNCs usually tailor their operations to make some accommodation to local culture, their great reach means that people around the world have similar experiences when dealing with them. The sociologist George Ritzer (1993) coined the phrase “McDonaldization” to refer to this increasing homogenization of culture. According to Ritter, experiences of all kinds are increasingly dominated by efficiency, calculability (basing assessment on quantifiable, objective outcomes), standardization, and control.

McDonald’s itself is perhaps the greatest practitioner of McDonaldization (Figure 16.5). In 2021, it had more than 40,000 locations in more than 100 countries[23]. However, in 2022, Subway was larger, with between 41 and 42,000 stores (down somewhat from its high of over 44,000 locations) including 183 in Finland, 621 in India, 120 in Taiwan and1 in Djibouti[24]. In 2022, KFC was in more countries than either of these two —145— but had only 25,000 locations[25]. The international spread of businesses that deal directly with consumers isn’t limited to the fast-food industry or U.S. corporations. In 2022 Walmart had more than 10,500 stores and clubs operating under 46 different names in 24 countries and eCommerce websites. Half of Walmart stores are outside of the United States. Walmart employs 2.3 million people, about 700,000 of them outside the U.S.[26] French retailer Carrefour operates 12,000 shops in more than 30 countries, and German food retailers Lidl and Aldi operate thousands of stores across Europe and the United States.

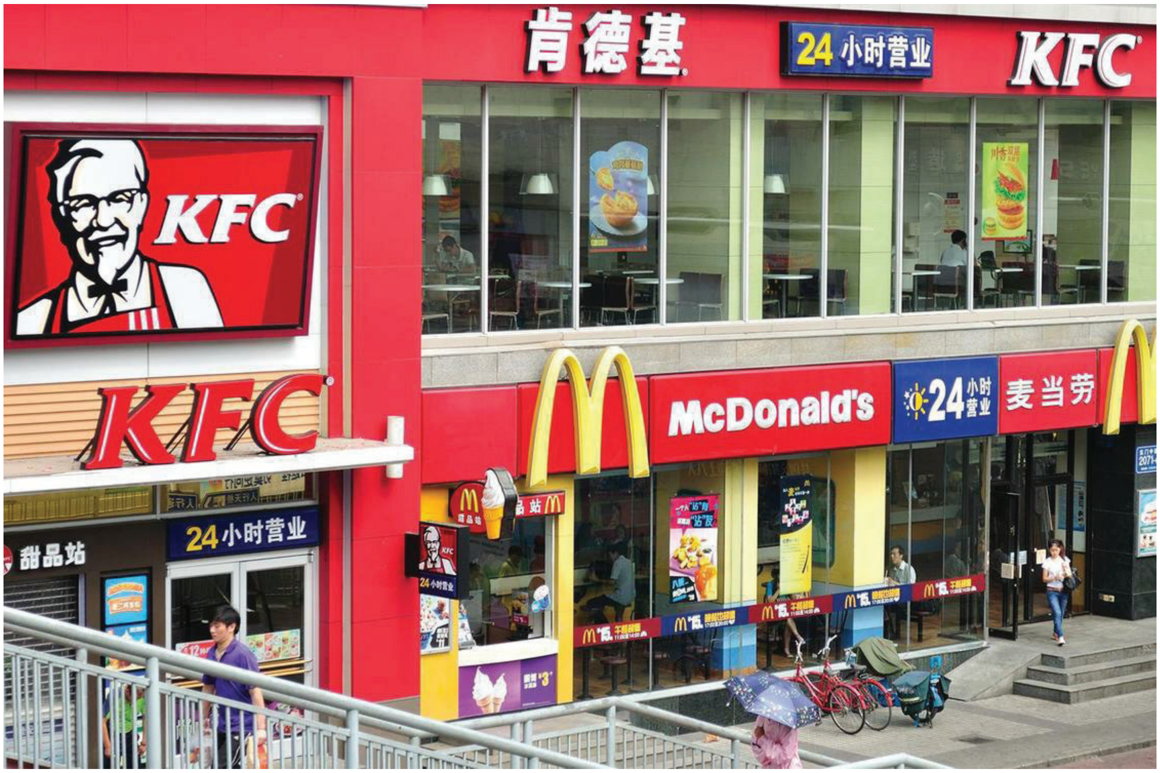


Figure 16.5 KFC and Mcdonald's locations in Shenzhen, China.

iStockphoto.com/oasistrek

The media is also significantly internationalized. CNN has 12 branded networks and is available to almost one-third of the world’s population in more than 200 countries and territories (CNN, 2018). Google has 70 offices in 50 countries. In mid 2021, Facebook had 2.9 billion users worldwide. Only 259 million of these were in the United States. Table 16.1 shows the leading countries for Facebook use in mid 2021. Movies are also becoming increasingly international as well. As of May 2022, the U.S. blockbuster *Spider-Man: No Way Home* had earned more than 57% of its $1.9 billion revenue outside the United States, and the far less successful *Dune* (2021) had earned 73 percent of its revenue from foreign sales[27].

Table 16.1

		Number of Facebook users in

Rank	Country	millions
1	India	416
2	United States	240
3	Indonesia	176
4	Brazil	139
5	Philippines	91
6	Mexico	79
7	Vietnam	76
8	Thailand	58
9	Japan	56
10	Pakistan	40

Countries by the number of Facebook users.

Source: World Population Review. Facebook Users by Country 2022. Retrieved May 22, 2022, from https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/facebook-users-by-country

None of these facts are necessarily bad things. Part of the success and usefulness of these companies and products is that they are available in so many places. If people in Thailand did not wish to buy KFC, the company's locations there would soon close. If people in Bulgaria were not interested in *Spider-Man*, it probably wouldn't have been released there. However, all this does mean a reduction in cultural variation. It means that billions of people throughout the world have cultural experiences that are in some ways similar. And the more time people spend on Facebook, in Walmart locations, or watching international movies, the less time they spend doing other things.

Multinational Corporations: Gender

In many places, MNCs have had significant effects on gender issues and thus on the structure of society as well. MNCs and their close links with the world economy have provided new economic power to men. In Papua New Guinea, for example, oil revenues paid to male groups have enabled them to expand their social networks but have alienated them from earlier exchange networks and from women (Gilberthorpe, 2007). In other places, MNCs employ large numbers of female workers because women are perceived as more easily controlled than men. Indeed, women are victims of some of the worst labor abuses. However, money earned from working may give women economic power that can improve their positions in society as well as that of their families (Freeman, 2007). Reeves (2006, p. 8) reported that the young female Indonesian immigrant workers he studied were drawn to wage labor for many disparate reasons, including “a desire for financial independence from family… a commitment to improve one’s family’s economic outcomes… personal development goals, [and] a long-term hope of saving enough seed capital to open small businesses upon return to Indonesia.” In its 2021 report, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development[28] noted that the positive effects of multinational corporations on gender equity are well documented. Examples include the Bangladeshi textile industry, where partners of multinationals had 50 percent more female administrative workers than local firms, and in South Africa where multinationals hire women at higher skill levels and more than double the average wage than local firms.

The far-reaching operation of MNCs raises important questions that people in wealthy and poor nations alike must face. Can low-wage jobs lead to prosperity? Can groups maintain cultural distinctiveness in the face of an increasingly uniform society? What are the consequences of a system that makes people wealthier and increases their access to consumer goods but that also increases the disparity between the rich and the poor and makes people increasingly aware of that disparity?

URBANIZATION

In 1950, only about 30 percent of the world’s population lived in cities. By 1985, this figure had reached 41%. By 2008, more than half of the world’s population lived in cities. And in 2020, the number had grown to 55%, or 4.2 billion people[29]. with almost a quarter of the world’s population living in cities of at least a million people[30]. By 2045, the world's urban population is expected to exceed 6 billion. Rural populations, on the other hand, are expected to decline to about 3.1 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2014)

In 1950, seven of the world's 10 largest cities were in Europe, Russia, Japan, and the United States. The average population of these cities was about 6.7 million. In 2022, only two cities in these nations made the top 10: Tokyo and Osaka (New York was number 11)[31]. There are 34 cities with populations greater than 10 million, and only five of these are in Europe, the United States, or Japan. Six are in China; six are in India. The average population of the world's 10 largest cities was 22 million in 2022.

Almost all the urban population growth between now and 2050 is expected to occur in the world's poor nations (United Nations, 2018). Some of the cities that have resulted from this population growth are truly enormous. The population of Dhaka in Bangladesh is 22.5 million, Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo is 15.6 million, and Lagos in Nigeria is 15.4 million. Providing basic services to such large populations in these poor nations will be an enormous challenge.

Rural people move to cities in search of jobs and other social, material, and cultural advantages. They are forced out of the countryside by high population levels, inability to acquire land, environmental degradation, and, frequently, violence. When new migrants arrive in urban areas, they often find dismal living conditions. In 2018, about a quarter of the global urban population lived in slums. This is a substantial improvement from almost 40% in 2000[32]. However, there was a great deal of regional variation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 55 percent of city dwellers lived in slums and in Central and Southern Asia, more than 31 percent did[33]. However, as bad as life can be in places like the slums of Mumbai, India, most people are there because they believe their lives and prospects are better than in the rural villages they left behind.

With urbanization comes the development of a great variety of social groups based on voluntary membership. Such associations may serve as mutual aid societies—lending money to members, providing scholarships for students, arranging funerals, and taking care of marriage arrangements for urban migrants. Some develop along kinship or ethnic lines that were relevant in the traditional culture; others, such as labor unions, are based on relationships deriving from new economic contexts and have no parallel in rural society.

Urban life can be extremely difficult. Many of the urban poor face hunger, unsafe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and substandard shelter. Disease and early death are rampant in the slums of the world’s largest cities. The experience of the urban poor is not necessarily characterized by association and solidarity. Survival on the margins of the urban environment is often ruthlessly competitive. As Katherine Boo related in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012), in-fighting, crime, and violence are common in deeply impoverished urban communities (Figure 16.6). People struggle for any advantage that might allow them and their children to escape crushing poverty. They face laws that protect the interests of the wealthy and powerful and are often forced into illegal activities merely to survive. Frequently, police and justice systems do not provide protection but rather extort what little money people have. Yet despite these difficulties, cities continue to grow. This reflects both the profound poverty and desperation that characterizes so much of the rural areas of poor nations and the fervent desire of hundreds of millions of the world’s poor for economic advancement.

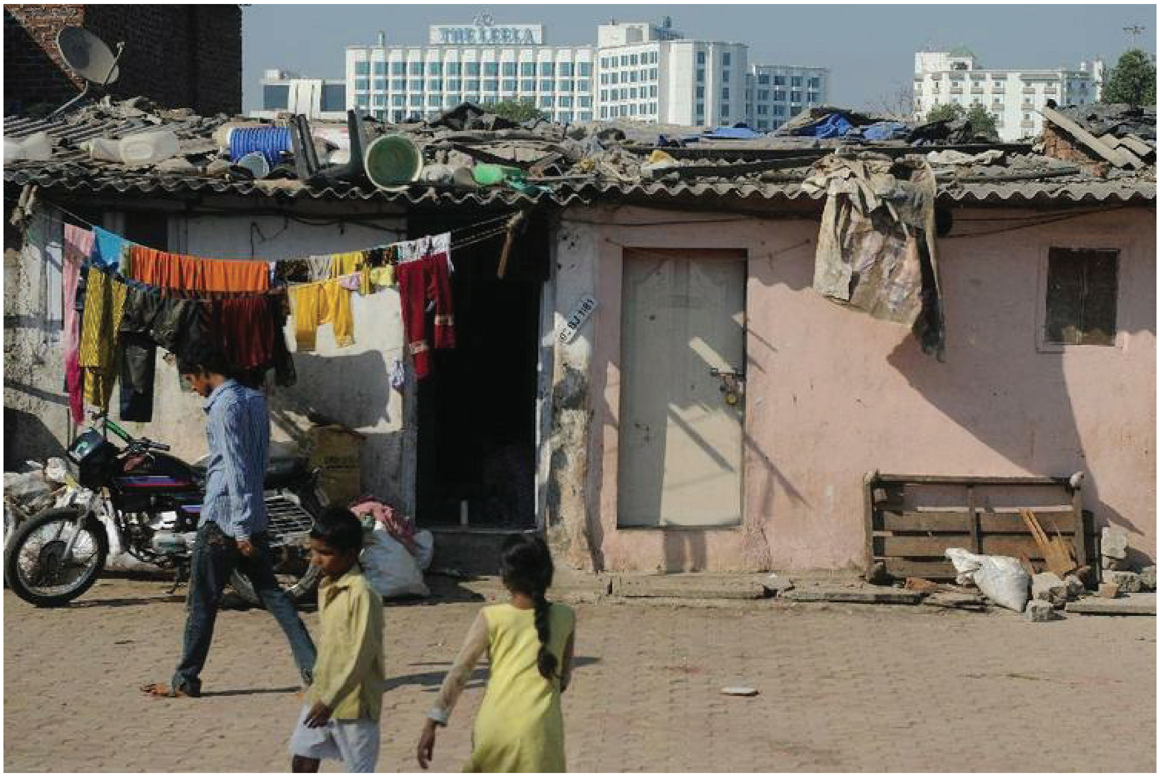


Figure 16.6 About one of every eight people in the world lives in an urban slum. Here, a new luxury hotel rises behind Annawadi, the slum in Mumbai described by Katherine Boo in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.

INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/AFP via Getty Images

Any solution to the problems caused by urbanization must focus on both rural and urban areas. Nations must provide adequate services, including water, sewage, education, and health care, to their urban populations. However, unless life chances and opportunities are greatly improved for rural populations, better services in the cities will only draw more migrants who will quickly overwhelm any advances made.

Urbanization has had and will continue to have enormous cultural impacts. Cities are engines of cultural change. Many of the customs, traditions, and lifeways of people in rural areas are often lost or greatly diminished when they move to the city. Cultural practices having to do with the agricultural cycle are no longer necessary. Rituals, beliefs, and ideas that are particular to specific villages and communities often die out when members of these communities migrate to cities. Sometimes migration leaves too few people in rural areas to carry on customs, and those who have moved to urban areas may be isolated from others with whom they shared these practices.

Urban people receive far more exposure to education and the media, both of which tend to reflect and enforce the views of cultural majorities and those with power. To fit in and to be economically successful, urban dwellers may have to suppress cultural differences. Migration may result in loss of language, social structures, values, and support networks. Anthropologist Maurice Eisenruch (1991) coined the term *cultural bereavement* to describe the state of mind of refugees fleeing from wars—their sorrow and psychological distress at being separated from their cultures and thrust into a new environment. Dinesh Bhugra and Matthew Becker (2005) noted that the term frequently applies to voluntary migrants as well. There is no doubt that many of the cultural practices and ideas that anthropologists studied in the 19th and 20th centuries are disappearing as people leave rural areas for cities.

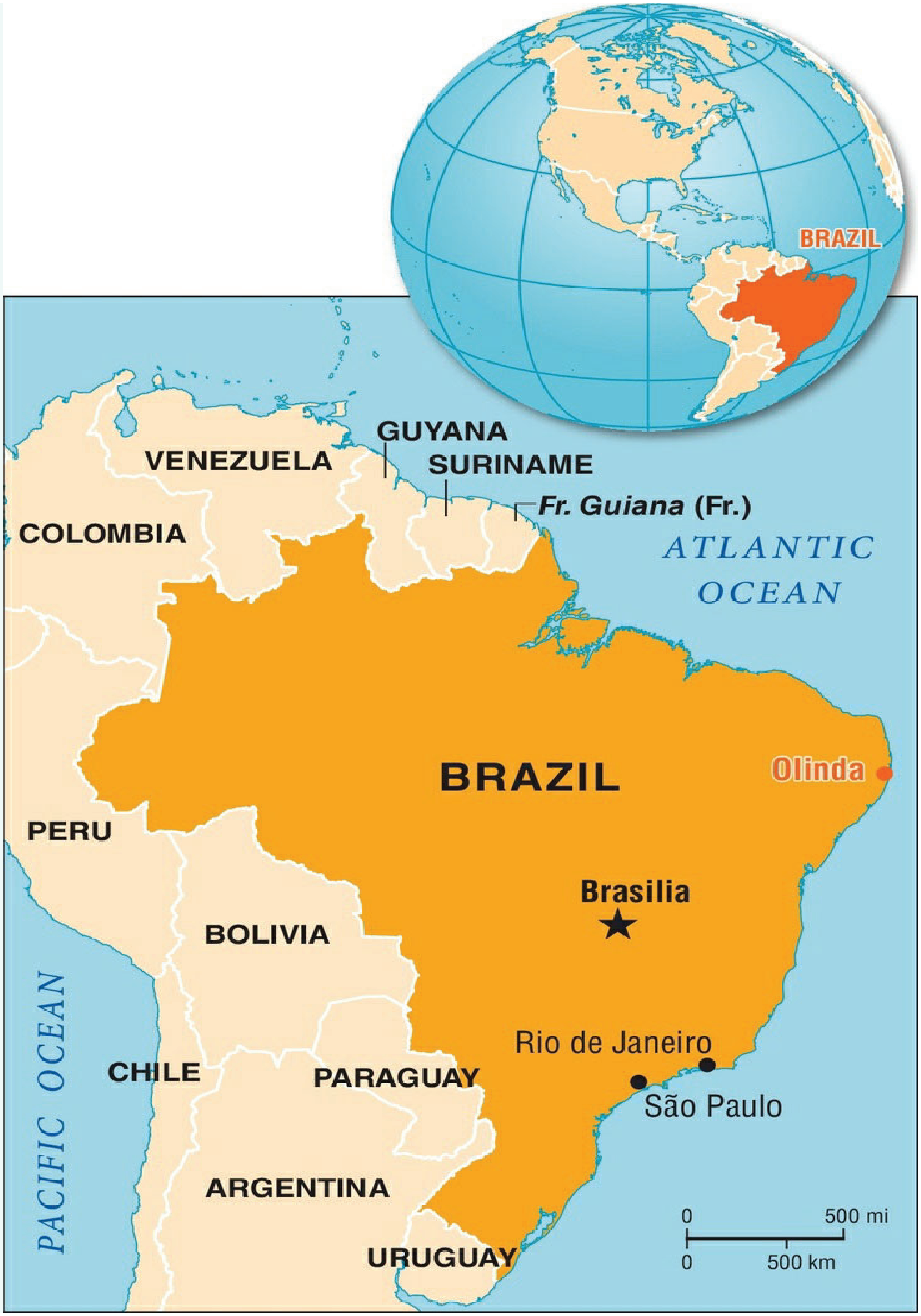
However, cities are also great incubators of cultural innovation. Some of the cultural ideas and practices people bring with them to urban areas often survive, though frequently in new forms. The exposure of urban people to members of different cultures and different lifeways can be profoundly generative of new types of art, ritual, food, and music. According to anthropologist Gisela Welz (2003), anthropology has frequently shown that contact between different cultures creates opportunities for innovation. Cities engender this because they place many different people in close contact with each other. Ulf Hannerz (1992, p. 203) wrote that cities promote unexpected discoveries: “You find things without specifically looking for them because they are around you all the time.” Hannerz calls the interactivity of culture and the flow of ideas and practices among individuals and cultures the “urban swirl.” Many—perhaps most—anthropologists today work in urban areas investigating how people have adapted to urban lifestyles and the cultural innovations that have resulted.

Ethnography

Child Labor in Brazil

For the middle and upper classes in both wealthy and poor countries, childhood is understood as a period of life distinct and separate from adulthood. Relationships between parents and children should be permanent and characterized by love. The proper place for children is in school. Certain types of labor, including schoolwork, household chores, and working alongside adult relatives, are considered appropriate for children. However, work that occupies most of a child’s life and is directly remunerated in cash, such as begging or employment in manufacturing, is considered inappropriate. Many of these values are enshrined in law in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which declares that children should “grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding.” The convention further states that “children should be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to…[their] development.” However, millions of children worldwide live in conditions that are very far removed from this ideal of childhood. Although the numbers are controversial, the World Bank has reported that more than 350 million children worldwide live in extreme poverty. Children are twice as likely as adults to live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2016). Tens of millions of children live on the streets (Thomas de Benitez, 2011), and hundreds of millions do dangerous work, are exposed to hazardous conditions, and face family conditions of violence and instability.

Anthropologist Mary Kenny studied child workers in Olinda, a town of about 400,000 in northeast Brazil. Because Olinda was an important town in the 17th century and has preserved some of its colonial heritage, it is a destination for tourists. However, it is also an impoverished town in a deeply impoverished part of Brazil. Kenny reported that during her study, about 60% of Olinda’s population lived in *favelas* (shantytowns) or other poor neighborhoods (Figure 16.7). She described the *favelas* as mazes of small pathways leading to two- and three-room homes made of brick, wood, paper, and tin. Each building is home to an average of 10 people. Throughout the *favela* are “open cement drains filled with a grey liquid with bubbles on top, emitting a wretched stench that never quits” (Kenny, 1997, p. 90). According to Kenny, relations among residents of *favelas* are neither friendly nor cooperative. Although solidarity, pooling of resources, borrowing, and sharing do occur, they are obliterated by suspicion and scarcity (Kenny, 2007, p. 59).


BRAZIL
GUYANA
VENEZUELA
SURINAME
Fr. Guiana (Fr.)
COLOMBIA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
BRAZIL
Olinda
PERU
Brasilia
BOLIVIA
PACIFIC OCEAN
Rio de Janeiro
CHILE
PARAGUAY
São Paulo
ARGENTINA
0
500 mi
URUGUAY
0
500 km

Description

Map 16.1 Location of Olinda in Brazil.

Figure 16.7 Children of Olinda’s favelas pose for a picture.

VINCENZO PINTO/AFP via Getty Images

For adult residents of the *favela*, regular paid work is very difficult to find. Some men are day laborers, others wash cars or sell peanuts and ice pops. Women sometimes work as laundresses, hairdressers, or seamstresses. However, none of these jobs provides enough money to support even a small family. In these circumstances, the labor of even very young children becomes essential. Children under the age of 12 sell small items, guard cars, carry goods, wash dishes, and clean. Garbage picking also is another key occupation for them. Conditions for garbage pickers are harsh, and the health of children and adults is jeopardized by a wide range of diseases, infections, parasites, and rodents. Horrors abound at the dumps; for example, during Kenny’s study, at least two human bodies were found there each week (Kenny, 1997, p. 105). However, with the labor of children, a family of garbage pickers can earn enough to survive. Children and adults may also find food that is still edible in the dumps.

Children under 12 can also make money as beggars. Kenny spoke with Dalva, a 12-year-who organized the four younger children in her family to beg from tourists in the old colonial district of town. Because Dalva’s parents produced very little income, the family was able to survive only because of Dalva’s ability to beg. Dalva said, “If I don’t work, my family will go hungry… I can take it. It’s my fate” (Kenny, 1997, p. 108). Although Dalva gave her parents most of the money she and the younger children received, she did retain some for herself. She also begged and bought a variety of food and small items during her workday. Dalva lived with her mother, and her father was sometimes present, but Kenny reported that Dalva’s income-generating abilities effectively made her a household head. Beggars, trash pickers, and other working children do sometimes go to school, but this is expensive. Even though there is no tuition, students require proper clothes and school supplies that families often cannot afford.

Stories of children such as Dalva are disturbing to us not only because of the horrific conditions under which these children live but also because they challenge our notion of childhood. However, the roles and behaviors appropriate to young children vary enormously from culture to culture. In today’s wealthy nations, child labor was the rule rather than the exception until the late 19th century. Then, as industrial and agricultural processes changed, increased emphasis was placed on childhood as a time of schooling rather than work. Universal compulsory education in the United States dates only to the early years of the 20th century. In places such as Olinda, families can survive only because of the income-generating activities of their children. In fact, in many cases, children have higher earning abilities than adults.

Kenny’s study noted that for the children of Olinda’s *favelas*, the efforts of well-intentioned reformers are often ineffective or, worse yet, work against the interests of those they are intended to help. Such efforts are based on the norms of the Brazilian middle and upper classes. Reformers promote policies intended to keep families together, but the families of Olinda’s poor are often brutally exploitative of their children. Reformers promote education, but education is not only expensive, it also reduces the time children can spend earning money and thus threatens their families’ survival. Further, education is only economically valuable when it provides access to higher-paying jobs. In the *favelas*, the odds of getting these jobs are vanishingly small.

Kenny’s study of Brazilian child workers makes it clear that the exploitation of children is not the problem. Rather, it is a symptom of poverty. She noted that although child advocates drawn from the middle and wealthy classes advocate for the elimination of child labor, child laborers themselves advocate for better wages and more secure jobs. These demands are the same as those made by adults from the same areas “who work in conditions as damaging to health and as exploitative as those faced by their children” (Kenny, 1997, p. 216).

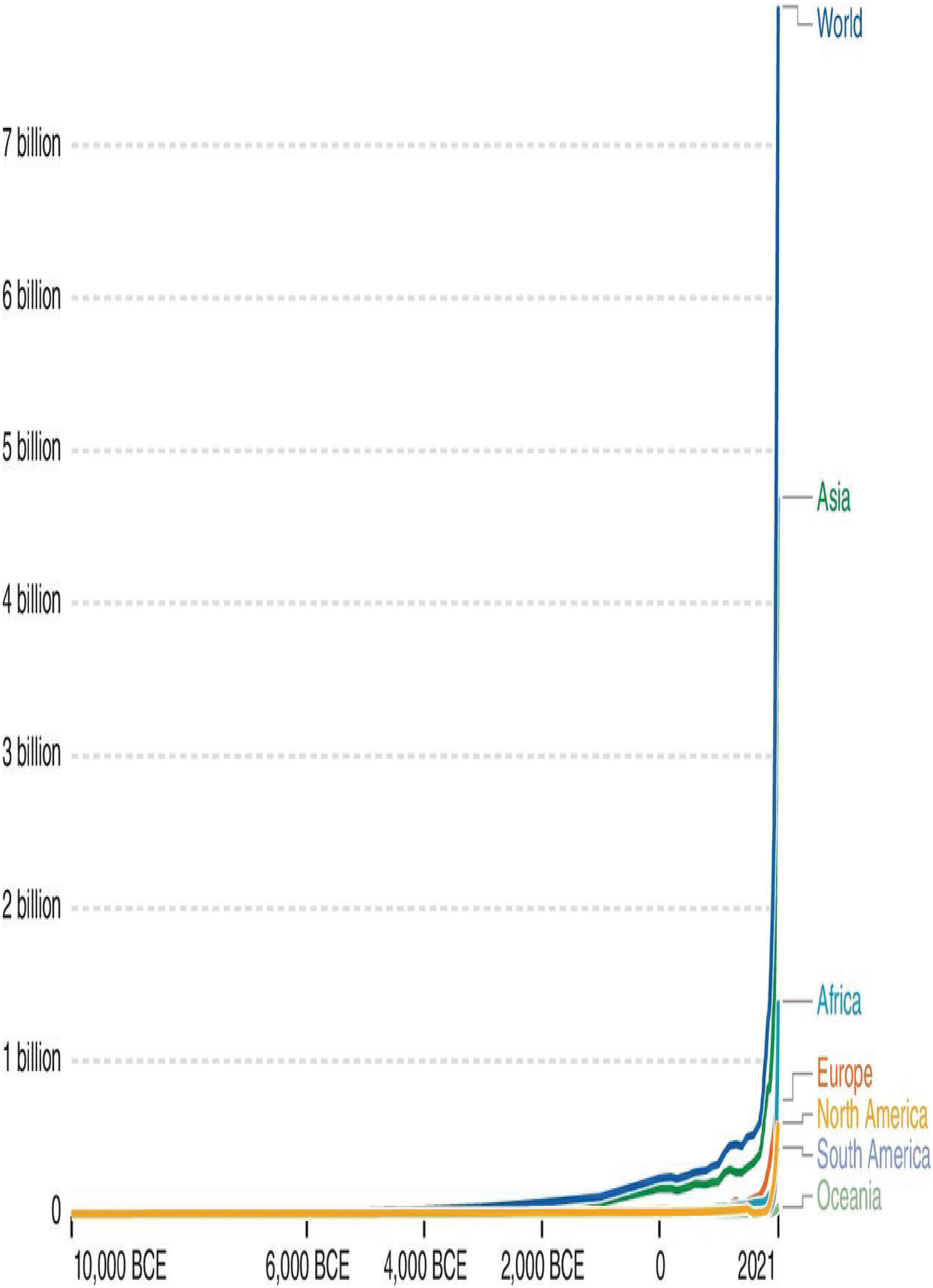
In the time since her original field research, Kenny has continued to return regularly to Brazil. Many of the children with whom she worked have moved on, migrated to Rio de Janeiro, or, sadly, passed away. Beginning in 2003, with the launch of the *Bolsa Familia* a series of anti-poverty programs succeeded in reducing the level of poverty significantly. Financial assistance programs and interventions have provided a base of support for addressing poverty, access to education, and health care. Brazil has historically had very high levels of wealth and income inequality. It still ranks among the 20 nations with the most inequality. However, Brazilian inequality has dropped substantially since the introduction of anti-poverty programs in the early 2000s[34]. Unsurprisingly, Brazil’s anti-poverty efforts are deeply political. While around the world, poverty deepened during the pandemic year of 2020, in Brazil, it went down due to high levels of government support. This support was tied to ultra-nationalist president Jair Bolosonaro’s desire to maintain his popularity and win a second term in office. Temporary bonuses to 17 million families are set to expire in December 2022, just after Brazil’s presidential election (Economist, 2021).

Critical Thinking Questions

1. This ethnography suggests that our notions about childhood are often culturally bound. Do you believe any aspects of childhood are or should be universal?
2. Some studies of the poor have documented their use of networks of cooperation to survive, but these are not characteristic of life in Olinda's *favelas*. What forces do you think prevent such networks from forming?
3. Anthropologists have often favored a human needs approach to economic development. Would that approach benefit the children of Olinda?

POPULATION PRESSURE

The rate of population growth provides a dramatic index of the increasing speed of social change. About 2 million years ago, our remote ancestors numbered perhaps 100,000. By the time the first agricultural societies were developing 10,000 years ago, the world population had reached 5–10 million. Two thousand years ago, there were about 250 million people in the world. By 1750, this number had tripled to 750 million. Then, population growth *really* began to accelerate. Fifty years later, in 1800, there were 1 billion people on earth; by 1930, there were 2 billion. Since then, the world population has more than tripled, surpassing the 6 billion mark in the summer of 1999 (Erickson, 1995; Fetto, 1999, Figure 16.8). In spring 2018, the world population stood at 7.9 billion. There is substantial disagreement among scientists on population projections for the remainder of the 21st century. The UN expects the world population to plateau at about 10.9 billion at the end of the century, but other research groups predict that the world population will peak at about 9.7 billion by 2070 and decline thereafter (Adam, 2021). Around the world, the decline in fertility has been steep as the charts on page ??? in Chapter 11 showed, fertility has been declining in both wealthy and poor nations. (see Figure ?.? in chapter ?). This may result in dramatic declines in world population in the late 21st and early 22nd centuries.


World
7 billion
6 billion
5 billion
Asia
4 billion
3 billion
2 billion
Africa
1 billion
Europe
North America
South America
Oceania
0
10,000 BCE
6,000 BCE
4,000 BCE
2,000 BCE
0
2021

Description

Figure 16.8 Population growth since 10,000 BCE

Source: Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Lucas Rodés-Guirao (2013) - “World Population Growth”. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: 'https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth' [Online Resource]

In 1961, the average amount of farming land per person in the world was a bit less than an acre. By 2015, this had declined to under a half acre (World Bank, 2018). As population increases, it will decline still further. Agricultural land is increasingly valuable and must be farmed using very intensive agricultural techniques for the world to feed itself. This has resulted in profound cultural changes. For example, among the Waluguru in Tanzania, population increase resulted in land shortage, which in turn resulted in the privatization of land. Before the mid-20th century, the Waluguru gained access to land through their lineages, and lineage heads were powerful figures. Today, however, land must be purchased, and not only has the institution of the lineage head completely disappeared, it is hardly even remembered. Van Donge (1992) reported that as land has become scarce, women in this matrilineal society have tightened their hold over it. This has weakened the position of men in marriage to the point where many prefer to migrate to the cities to marry. More than 37% of women over 20 are now unmarried, compared with 15% of men.

In other cases, the rising value of land leads to the eviction of people who have lived on it for generations. For example, according to Kate Hodal (2013), between 2003 and 2013 more than 400,000 Cambodian farmers were forced off their land, often without compensation. The land was then turned over to sugar and rubber companies. More than 10% of the country has been displaced in this way.

China’s One-Child Policy

Programs to control population growth are often controversial. China’s one-child policy is a good example. Between 1979 and 2013, the Chinese government enforced a policy that limited families to a single child (although parents were allowed to keep twins or triplets). Families faced stiff penalties for additional children (Figure 16.9). This policy may have been a key factor in reducing fertility in China from about five births per woman 50 years ago to about 1.7 in 2018 (Baochang et al., 2007; World Bank, 2019) However, the policy’s cultural effects have been dramatic.

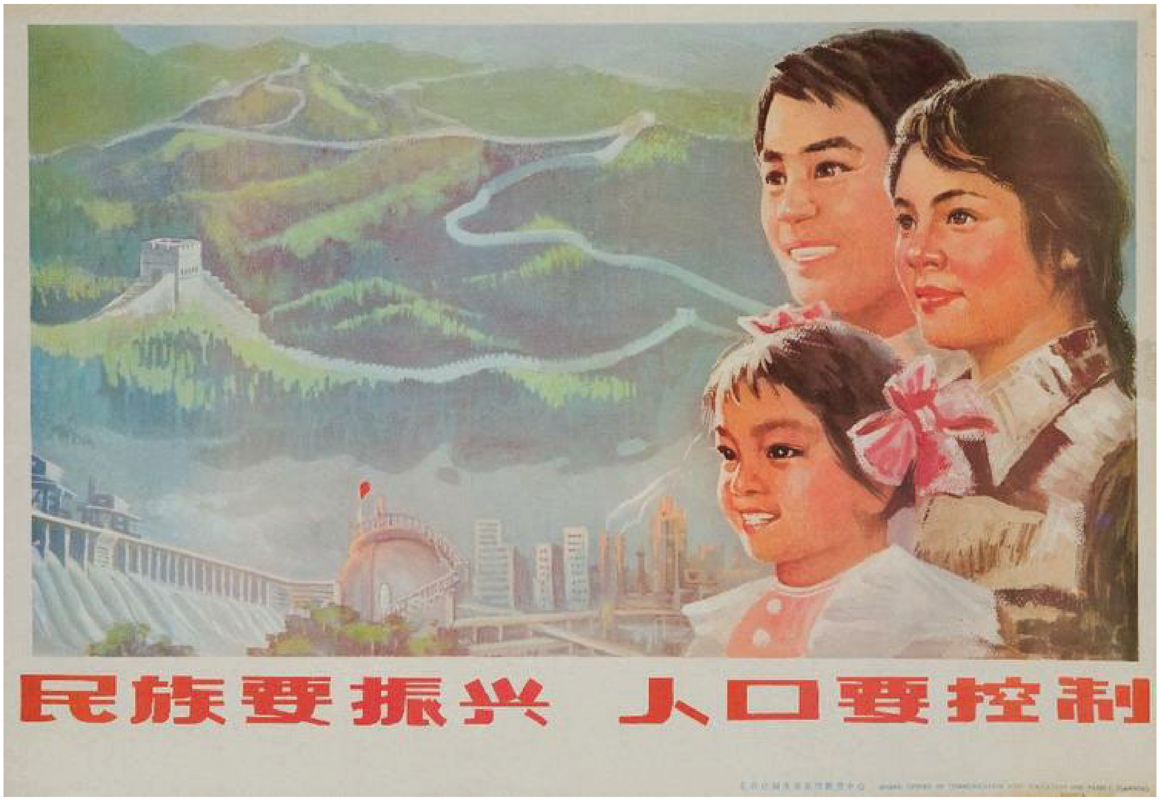

民族要振兴 人口要控制

Figure 16.9 Between 1979 and 2013, the Chinese government enforced regulations limiting families to a single child. Posters and billboards promoted the idea of the single-child family. This one reads, “If you want to prosper, you must control the population.”

David Pollack/Corbis via Getty Images

The largest effect has been a skewing of births in favor of males. Boys are culturally preferred because they are expected to live with their parents and provide support for them as they age. In 2004, the year with the greatest birth disparity, 121.2 boys were born for every 100 girls (Guilford, 2013). In some poor regions of the country, there were twice as many male births as female births. Although the numbers had become more equal by 2020, there were still 111.3 male births for every 100 female births (Heng 2021). Demographers estimate that China is missing 60 million women and girls. These are people who should have been born, but, because of gender-selective abortion, were not ("A Distorted Sex Ratio," 2017). In early 2023, China's National Bureau of Statistics reported that the country's population was shrinking. China reported a decline in population of 850,000 people in 2022.

This extreme sex imbalance created fundamental changes in society. Wealthy men have no trouble finding mates, but it is much more difficult for the rural poor. This has led to the importation of women from poorer countries such as Cambodia and Myanmar, informal polyandry, the sale of young women, and human trafficking. Physical and emotional abuses of trafficked women are rife. In 2019, Chinese authorities rescued over 1,100 women who had been trafficked by criminal gangs (Yi, 2019).

China's one-child policy was a profound intervention in the lives of most Chinese families. There is strong evidence that it included human rights abuses such as forced abortions and sterilizations (Gordon, 2015). And it might have been unnecessary. Fertility in China has fallen very sharply. However, fertility in South Korea fell even further during the same period, from over six 6 children per woman to 1.2, and there was a similar decline in Taiwan. Rates have fallen almost as fast in India and Indonesia as well (Plecher, 2020; World Bank, 2019). None of these countries instituted harsh regulations limiting family size. Like China, India suffers from an imbalanced sex ratio, but this is not the case in Taiwan, South Korea, or Indonesia. Clearly, there are factors other than government regulation involved in the decline of fertility.

Fertility, Politics, and Economics

Although China’s population issues are unique to its historical and cultural circumstances, population control is problematic in many places. In many cultures, a woman’s value is measured to some degree by the number of children she bears. Religious and political authorities often take an active stand against the use of birth control. Furthermore, intellectuals and governments in many poor nations are deeply suspicious of population control programs coming from wealthy nations. They note that the economies of wealthy nations have often prospered in times of population growth, and they suspect that wealthy nations are promoting their own interests when they attempt to limit the population in other countries. Sometimes they accuse the promoters of population control of racist intentions, observing that such programs usually consist of efforts by wealthy white people to limit the population growth of poor nonwhite people (Lichtenberg, 1994).

Beneath these accusations lies a series of difficult political and economic issues. It is often asserted that there is a maximum population the earth can support (its “carrying capacity”), and some analysts worry that we are approaching that number. They argue that we must control population or face widespread starvation. They see population growth as a “bomb” that will destroy society. This position ignores several important factors. First, the number of people supported by any environment depends on the technologies used in this support. Because technological change is unpredictable, estimates of future carrying capacity are inaccurate. But, more importantly, populations cannot be considered separate from their levels of consumption. The number of people who can be supported living a typical North American lifestyle is far different than the number of people who could be supported if people consumed more like the foragers discussed in earlier chapters of this book. Finally, the number of people who could be supported is dependent on assumptions we make about the value of the natural world. If we desire to preserve forest land, tropical rainforest, or other environments, we diminish the amount of land that is available for human population growth. Thus, the issues central to problems of population growth are primarily cultural, social, political, and moral, not scientific.

The high level of population growth and the low level of wealth in poor nations are closely related. When life expectancy at birth is low and poverty is rampant, it makes good economic sense for families to have large numbers of children. It helps to ensure that at least some will survive to adulthood, increases the labor pool available to the family, and improves the odds that one or more child will prosper, increasing overall family wealth.

As the wealth and consumption level of a population increases, family size almost always declines, a process often called the **demographic transition**. People choose to have fewer children for a series of reasons. When health conditions improve, children are more likely to survive. When jobs that pay livable salaries are available, fewer children are necessary to support a family. Urbanization, as well as increasing wealth and consumption, makes raising children far more expensive. Thus, in general, the benefits of large families decline, and their disadvantages increase. Greater prosperity, which moves people into the global middle class, is almost certainly the best and most successful form of population control.

THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

All over the world, indigenous peoples are an important part of the ethnic landscape. **Indigenous peoples** are members of relatively small-scale societies, usually bands, tribes, or chiefdoms, that have been incorporated into large nation-states. Generally, indigenous people are closely identified with their land, are relatively egalitarian, manage resources at the community level, and historically had high levels of economic self-sufficiency. Members of indigenous groups are often determined to maintain their autonomy, their lands, and their culture. This frequently brings them into conflict with other groups and with the governments of the nation-states within which they reside.

Because indigenous peoples require control over their land base to remain self-sufficient and politically autonomous, the loss of this land has often been accompanied by economic marginalization. Without land, indigenous peoples are pushed into participation in the global market economy, usually in a position of poverty. For example, starting in the 1950s, the Agta, a foraging group in the Philippines, was increasingly encroached upon by loggers and migrant farmers. By 1993, the Agta had become landless migrant workers living at the lowest level of Philippine society (Early & and Headland, 1998). Indigenous people have also been pulled into the global economy by their desire for consumer goods and modern lifestyles.

The United Nations has made several statements affirming the human rights and rights of self-determination of indigenous people. Organizations such as Survival International view self-determination as an inalienable right of indigenous people, arguing that such people must have the right to remain unmolested on their historic lands. These are positive developments. However, they may have little effect on national policy. Many countries that have relatively large populations of indigenous people, such as Brazil and Peru, also have large frontier areas where the scramble for natural resources occurs and laws are not well enforced.

Many governments have neither the will nor the resources to defend indigenous rights. In 2019, Brazil’s president Jair Bolsonaro repeatedly attacked protections for Brazil’s indigenous people, comparing them to animals in zoos and pushing for the dismantling of reserves set aside for them (Phillips, 2019). In 2020, the Bolsonaro government proposed a bill that would encourage mining and oil exploration on indigenous land. Other Brazilian government agencies have attacked indigenous land rights as well. According to Human Rights Pulse, actions of the Bolsonaro government have led to attacks on indigenous villages, the murders of indigenous activists, and deliberately started forest fires designed to give outsiders access to indigenous land. One activist said, “the President has made it clear that he won’t protect even one more millimeter of indigenous land. They want to kill us all and take our land.[36]”

Saami Reindeer Herders and Norway

Even when a nation has both the resources and the will to work with indigenous people, the course is still difficult. In Norway, the Saami reindeer herders are indigenous people attempting to retain their culture, including reindeer herding, while participating in the global economy (Figure 16.10). These objectives sit uneasily with each other, however, and are complicated by the actions of the Norwegian state. Although the Saami participate in the global economy, reindeer continue to have intrinsic value to the Saami, as both a form of wealth and a source of cultural distinctiveness.

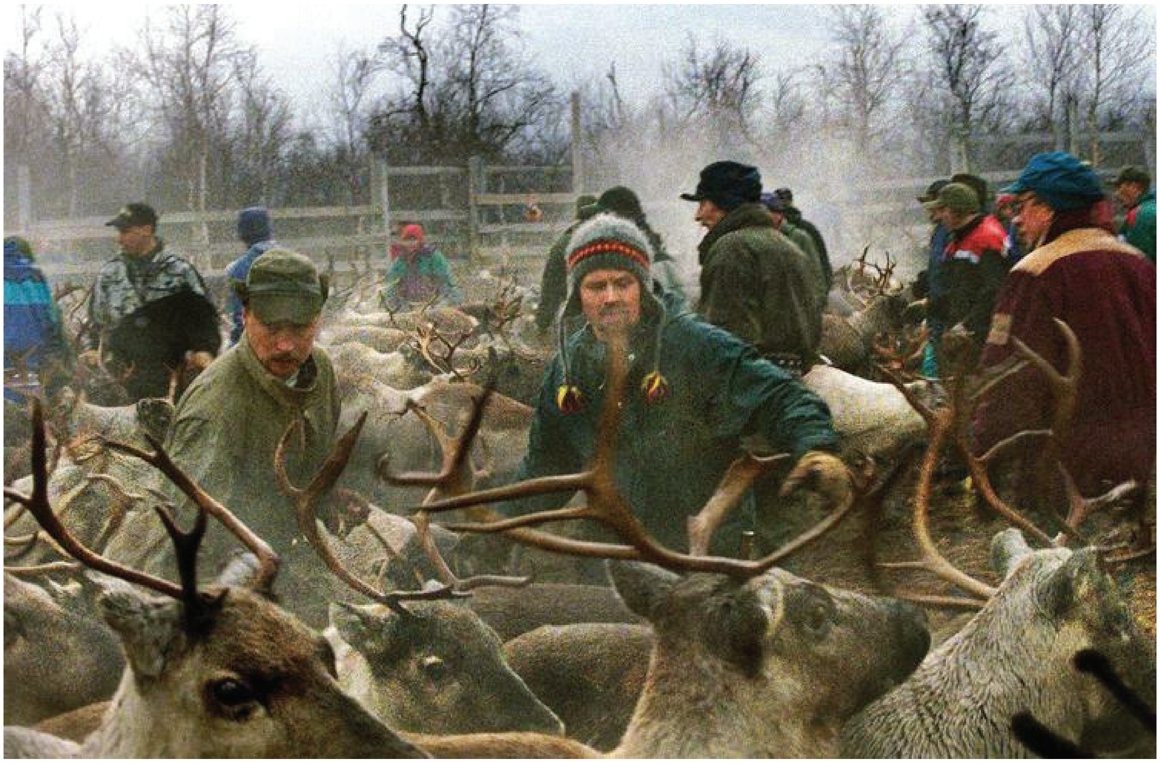


Figure 16.10 The Saami are an indigenous Arctic group that depends on reindeer herding. Here, they round up reindeer to prepare for the winter months.

In Pictures Ltd./Corbis via Getty Images

The Norwegian government is officially committed to furthering the

Saami reindeer-herding way of life. At the same time, Norway is committed to national economic development and environmental conservation, both of which the government says are impeded by unregulated Saami herding (Paine, 1994). In attempting to achieve its goals as a progressive, modern, egalitarian, multicultural nation, Norway regulates Saami reindeer herding in ways that impinge on Saami cultural values and practices and bring the Saami into conflict with the government.

The Norwegian government regards many traditional Saami herd-management practices as unproductive and detrimental to the environment. To change these practices, the government restricts reindeer pastureland and the number of herders. This conflicts with Saami historical ways of herding reindeer. It is not clear which herding methods are more ecologically sound, the Saami’s or those proposed by the Norwegian government. It is clear that the Norwegian government has the power to impose its understandings and practices on the Saami.

The Norwegian government has recognized Saami rights to land and natural resources and established tribunals to settle disputes (United Nations, 2016a). However, it views the Saami pastoral way of life as a gift from the state that must be balanced against other national objectives. Although Norwegian government policy protects Saami reindeer herding to a degree, it gives priority to national goals. The conflict between the Saami and the Norwegian state illustrates that even a benevolent state, one based on universalism, bureaucracy, and economic rationalism, offers little reassurance of a secure future for indigenous peoples.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Many of the gravest challenges to culture and, indeed, to human survival are environmental. The deterioration of the environment threatens people everywhere. As people around the world move into the global middle class, their consumption of both energy and consumer products increases. People who just a generation ago used relatively few disposable goods now live lifestyles characterized by many throwaway products. Further, many of these products are highly durable. Consider, for example, the plastic grocery bag. Although plastic grocery bags were invented in the 1960s, they were essentially unknown in most places, including the United States, until the early 1980s (Laskow, 2014). By 2015, however, the United States used more than 380 billion of them yearly. Plastic is made of petrochemicals, and each year we use the equivalent of about 12 million barrels of oil to make plastic bags. Worldwide, up to 1 trillion plastic bags are used every year (Anderson, 2016). The numbers are similarly staggering for the usage of other everyday disposable objects. For example, Americans are believed to use about 500 million plastic straws every day (Parker, 2018b), and China uses about 80 billion pairs of disposable chopsticks yearly (M. Moore, 2013).

As people become wealthier, their meat consumption increases as well. For example, the average person in China now consumes more than 20 times the amount of meat than half a century ago, and the nation consumes a quarter of the world’s meat (Smith, 2014; Myers, 2016). When people think about India, they often associate it with vegetarianism. However, as of 2014, 71% of Indians over the age of 15 were not vegetarians, and meat consumption was climbing rapidly (Rowland, 2017).

A similar pattern has occurred with energy consumption. Between 1990 and 2019, energy consumption in India almost tripled[37]. China, in 1993 used about 3 million barrels of petroleum per day. In 2019 daily consumption was over 14 million barrels[38]. Per capita energy consumption in the United States has been steadily dropping but in 2015 it was still three times Chinese consumption and more than 10 times India’s[39]. In 2021, the U.S. Energy Information Administration predicted that world consumption of energy would increase by nearly 50 percent by 2050[40].

The environmental consequences of these vast increases in production and consumption are hard to fathom. However, we already have some gloomy indications. An enormous patch of trash swirls in the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and California. A second patch lies off the west coast of Japan. The eastern patch, off the coast of California, is believed to be about double the size of Texas (Liu, 2018). By weight, much of the trash is gear from the fishing industry. However, there are also about 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic (Parker, 2018a). This is a problem not only because of the marine life killed by such garbage but also because more than 100 species of fish consume small bits of plastic, which then enter the food supply of other larger animals and humans (Parker, 2017, Figure 16.11). Scientists estimate that people around the world ingest more than 100,000 microplastic specs each day, perhaps the mass of a credit card yearly (Lim, 2021). A study of healthy people conducted in 2022 found microplastics in the blood of 77 percent of participants (Osborne, 2022).

Figure 16.11 The great Pacific garbage patch contains more than 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic. Here, marine researcher Charles Moore founder of the Algalita Marine Research and Education Foundation, holds a sample of ocean water taken from the garbage patch in 2008.

ZUMA Press, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

Pollution problems are not limited to the Pacific Ocean. The Gulf of Mexico contains a dead zone the size of the state of New Jersey. The Mississippi River collects runoff from farming and urban areas. When this nutrient-rich water enters the Gulf of Mexico, it creates enormous algae blooms that, when they decompose, consume all the available oxygen, making the water uninhabitable to most other life (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2017).

Global Warming

Global warming is probably the most highly publicized and certainly one of the most important aspects of environmental change. Unfortunately, despite overwhelming scientific consensus, the issue of global warming has become highly politicized. We can only report that in survey after survey, between 90% and 100% of scientists with relevant qualifications have affirmed both the reality of climate change and the importance of humans’ role in it. Nearly 200 worldwide scientific organizations have made public statements affirming that global warming is real and that human activity is a key part of it (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2018). Some brief facts: In 2020, atmospheric carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas, was at its highest level in 800,000 years. Over ice ages and warm periods, atmospheric carbon dioxide has fluctuated from less than 200 parts per million during ice ages to around 300 parts per million during warm periods. Today, atmospheric carbon dioxide is over 400 parts per million[41]. The global average temperature has risen almost two degrees Fahrenheit since 1880, and 18 of the hottest years on record have occurred since 2000[42]. The sea level has risen between 6 and 8 inches in the last 100 years, with half of that happening since 1993.[43]

It is unclear what the long-term effects of this warming trend will be. For example, there are some possible benefits to global warming, particularly in northern Europe and Russia, where it may extend the growing season through increased rainfall and reduce fuel consumption for heating. However, the impacts of warming are expected to be largely negative and to fall disproportionately on the poor. Many of the world's poor live in the tropics, where the effects of climate change are expected to be particularly severe. Warming may cut the growing season and reduce crop yields. The intensity of tropical storms is also expected to increase, which could have devastating effects. As we saw in Chapter 5, global warming has already had profound effects on Arctic cultures.

In numerous countries, rising sea levels pose a threat. On average, the Maldives, a nation consisting of over 1,000 islands in the Indian Ocean, is only 1.3 meters above sea level. Seychelles (also in the Indian Ocean) and the Solomon Islands, east of Papua New Guinea, are also threatened (Astaiza, 2012). However, the largest threats are in far more populous places. Some models of climate change now predict that by 2100, average temperatures will be almost six degrees Fahrenheit higher than they were in the 19th century. If this happens, almost 300 million people will be displaced. Cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, Osaka, Rio de Janeiro, Miami, and The Hague will be profoundly affected (Holder et al., 2017).

Wealthy nations have the resources to respond to climate change. They can build levees to control flooding, move their populations and their industries, and open new land to cultivation. Poor nations simply do not have the means at their disposal to do such things. In regions where survival is precarious today, climate change is likely to precipitate disaster.

The Effect of Pollution on the Poor

Even though the world’s poor consume only a small fraction of the earth’s resources, they face some of the worst problems of pollution and environmental deterioration. Although the world’s wealthiest people consume much more than the poorest, they tend to live in far cleaner environments. Consider the city of Bamako, the capital of Mali, on any late afternoon in the dry season. Most streets are unpaved, and automobiles, trucks, carts, bicycles, and foot traffic have been stirring up dust all day. Because most of the city lacks regular trash pickup or sewage, waste from humans and animals has been churned into the air. People are beginning to cook their evening meals. Many, perhaps the majority, of the city’s 2 million residents cook either on charcoal or wood fires that consume about 1 million tons of wood a year (Cissé, 2007), and the smoke from cookfires joins the dust in the air. The combined effect of smoke and dust is like a thick, hot, dry fog. Because most houses are relatively open and lack glass windows or doors that seal, the dust permeates the indoors as well as the outdoors. And Bamako’s population suffers. Pollution contributes to respiratory ailments, malaria, many diseases borne by sewage-contaminated water and air, and high childhood mortality. Meanwhile, rubbish piles up in more than 40 unauthorized dumps along the Niger River (Observers, 2018; Figure 16.12).

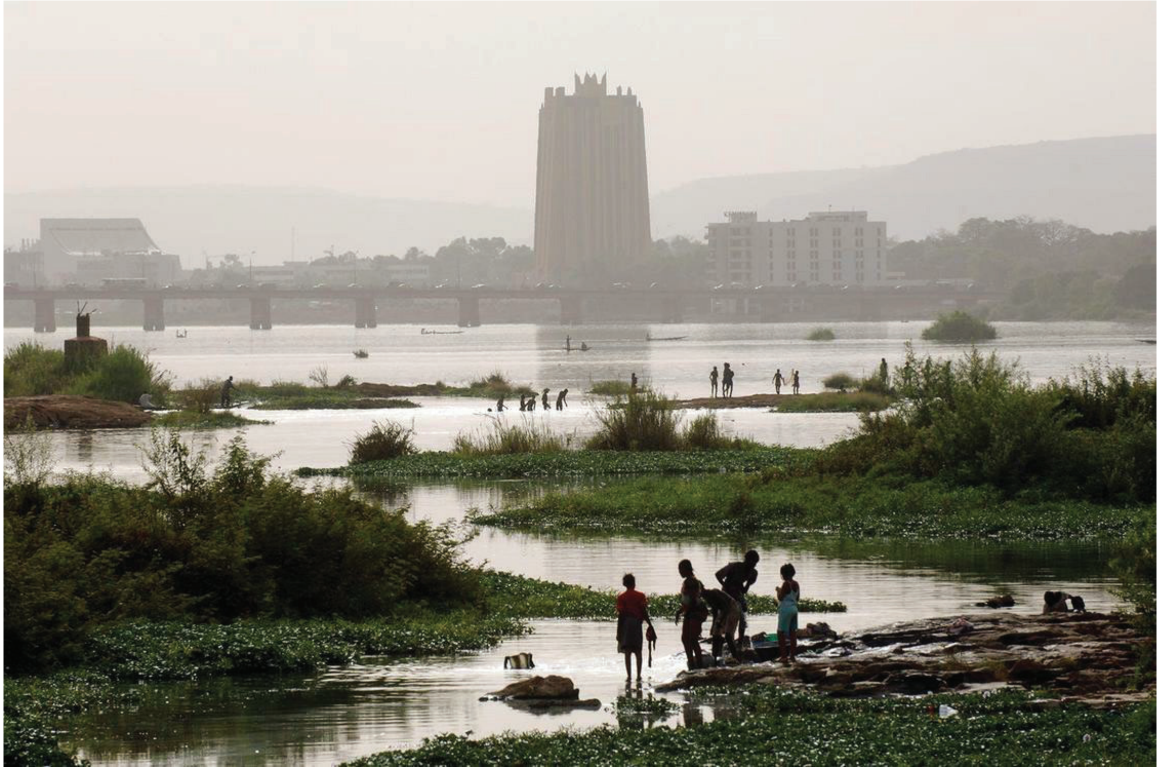


Figure 16.12 People in poor nations consume far less than those in wealthy nations but often live in far more polluted environments. Here, people in Bamako, Mali, scavenge amongst the refuse along the banks of the Niger River.

iStockphoto.com/oversnap

Compare this with a similarly sized U.S. city—say, San Antonio, Texas, a city of about 1.5 million. In San Antonio, most streets are paved, and almost all homes have access to safe, publicly maintained water and sewage systems. Meals are cooked on appliances powered by electricity or gas. There is a huge amount of vehicular traffic, but cars and trucks are equipped with pollution-controlling devices. Although San Antonio is not one of the wealthier U.S. cities, its population consumes many times the resources than the population of Bamako. But almost all of San Antonio’s population lives in environments that are healthier and far less polluted than Bamako.

Reasons for Hope?

The desire of people around the world to have lifestyles that are materially similar to those currently enjoyed by people in wealthy nations is wholly understandable. There are probably technical solutions to the problem of producing enough food and goods for a peak world population of between 9 and 11 billion. However, whether the problems generated by the energy required for that production and the waste by-products it will create will be solved is very much an open question. How to fulfill people's desire for prosperity while at the same time preventing production and consumption from making the planet unfit for human life is perhaps the greatest challenge of the 21st century.

Some trends point in the right direction. Renewable power sources such as wind and solar are the world's fastest-growing energy sources. In 2020, renewable energy sources accounted for almost 20 percent of United States electricity generation, up from 13 percent in 2015[44]. In Norway, renewables account for 70 percent of total energy usage. In Costa Rica, more than 99 percent of energy was generated from renewable sources in 2019. Worldwide, electricity generation from renewables is expected to surpass generation from coal by 2040 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2017). In 2015, most nations of the world signed the Paris Climate Agreement, which included pledges to hold the global average temperature to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above 19th-century levels (the United States withdrew from this agreement in 2017, but rejoined in 2021). In another promising development, in early 2017, China halted plans to build more than 100 coal-fired electricity generation plants.

In addition, manufacturing responds to both public pressure and the cost of raw materials. Manufacturers are usually moved toward efficiency, which means doing more with less. For example, the first IBM personal computer, which was introduced in 1981, weighed more than 50 pounds including the monitor. A typical smartphone in 2022 is many thousand times more powerful than that IBM machine but weighs only a few ounces. Digital electronics is an extreme example, but advances have been made in other areas of manufacturing as well.

These are hopeful signs. But are they too little and too late? The question is urgent, and most readers of this book will probably live long enough to learn the answer.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As this chapter has shown, cultures and societies around the world are faced with grave concerns. Keeping abreast of current events is often a depressing task. However, our study of anthropology gives us reasons for hope. Although the world is grappling with serious problems, we have more means at our disposal to solve these problems and improve people's lives than ever before. Anthropology can play a critical role in this process. The anthropological methodology and perspective emphasize understanding the meaning and experiences of cultural differences. Anthropologists certainly don't approve of all cultural practices. However, participant observation encourages us to experience the radical empathy that can defeat the division of the world into "us" and "them."

Anthropology teaches us about the dynamic elements of social organization. In this book, we have seen how anthropologists study economics, systems of production, political organization, stratification, beliefs and meaning, art, and history to develop analyses of culture. Anthropologists create models of cultures that explain the interrelationships between cultural elements and allow us to think productively about change, power, inequality, and meaning.

Anthropology cannot solve all of the world's problems, but it does have important contributions to make. With its holistic approach and emphasis on the importance of cultural differences, anthropology can develop frameworks to analyze and understand events and processes. We can help governments, organizations, and other groups find solutions that are sensitive to local cultural traditions and that respond to people’s needs and aspirations. Anthropology can help with problems as diverse as how to provide the best medical care for a society or how to create the best customer service experiences.

Anthropology also has a significant role to play in documentation. Anthropologists have been doing high-quality fieldwork around the world for almost 150 years, ensuring that people’s stories are not forgotten. Some of the cultures that anthropologists studied in the early 20th century have practically disappeared, and almost everyone in the world today lives very differently than they did in the late 19th century. Anthropology provides an important record of the human experience that might otherwise be lost or forgotten.

Anthropology offers hope to humanity because it shows us that biology is not destiny. Human culture rests on biological foundations. We have culture because our brains and bodies have evolved to create it, learn it, and to be dependent on it. Biology may predispose us to behave in certain ways, but no aspect of human culture can be firmly tied to a gene, and while predispositions may encourage people to behave in certain ways, they do not require it. Social rules may easily go against predispositions.

Anthropologists have shown over and over that culture is enormously flexible, fantastically changeable, and almost incredibly varied. The problems we face are not the result of a fixed and unchanging human nature. Violence, poverty, racism, and hatred of all kinds are caused by and shaped by culture. They do not exist because humans are invariably given to warfare and hatred or because human nature somehow demands extreme wealth and desperate poverty. These are social facts—aspects of human culture and human society. Because they are cultural, they can be changed. We can continue to invent new cultural forms—new designs for living.

In the first chapter of this book, we said that there were three key reasons to study anthropology. The first was that it helps us to understand other people. The second was that it helps us think about what it means to be a human being, both in the sense of being heirs to the endless variety of different beliefs and practices of people in all cultures throughout time and in the commonalities we share with all people. Finally, we use anthropology to think creatively about culture and how to live successfully together. In this book, we've explored hundreds of different cultures, practices, beliefs, and anthropological principles. Now, it's your turn to think about how to apply these lessons to your life, to your job, and to your relationships with your friends, family, and community.

More than a century ago, E. B. Tylor, the man often considered the founder of British anthropology, wrote that anthropology was a reformer's science. By this, he meant that if we could first understand that culture was not simply a reflection of human biology, and if we could then analyze and understand culture itself, we could discover ways to improve humanity's lot. Understanding how varied cultures are and how flexible culture is, gives us hope for a better future. Anthropology gives us some of the analytical tools to act on that hope.

Key Questions:

1. What is the most important thing you've learned from studying anthropology?
2. What do you think is the single largest problem facing the world today? What contributions can anthropology make to understanding and solving this problem?
3. If you could change a single thing in your community, what would it be? How do you think the change would affect other aspects of your community?

SUMMARY

1. Describe the key political and economic patterns between the end of World War II and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. After World War II, most colonies achieved independence, but much of

the world was impoverished. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union propelled violent confrontations around the world in which millions died.

2. What principal political and economic changes occurred after 1990? The collapse of the Soviet Union led to violence in some places but greatly reduced it in others. Technical changes in transportation and communications decreased the costs of moving goods and people, allowing for tighter world economic integration. Digital technologies also enabled and increased political and economic changes. Enormous numbers of people were lifted from extreme poverty
3. Have world poverty and instability ended? Emphatically no! Almost a billion people remain extremely poor, and violence and instability blight lives in many places. Migrants, refugees, and displaced persons have profound effects both on the communities they leave and on the communities they relocate to. Migration has become a major political issue.
4. What is development aid and what roles have anthropologists played in it? In our “Anthropology Makes a Difference” section, we noted that development aid refers to attempts by wealthy nations to improve economic and life conditions in poor nations. It was an aspect of the Cold War but remains important in many places today. Although there have been many development failures, dramatic successes have occurred as well. Anthropologists often play important roles in tailoring development projects to local communities and in facilitating communication between these communities and the governments and agencies funding the projects.
5. What are multinational corporations (MNCs) and what role do they play in world poverty? MNCs are corporations that own business enterprises in more than one nation. They are able to seek the most profitable venues to produce and market goods regardless of national boundaries. Many MNCs have annual budgets far larger than most countries. This and their mobility give them huge economic and political power. MNCs search for the most profitable places to buy, sell, and manufacture goods. Their effects on poor nations are extremely controversial.

However, it is clear that the shareholders of MNCs, who are located primarily in wealthy nations, are the primary beneficiaries of the corporations' activities.

6. What are some of the ways in which MNCs change culture? MNCs contribute to the standardization of experiences worldwide—a phenomenon sometimes called McDonaldization. Their operations tend to diminish differences between cultures. They also have an impact on gender roles, often making new forms of work available to men and women.
7. What important roles do children play in extremely impoverished communities? An ethnography of children in Olinda, Brazil, shows that children in deeply impoverished areas take on adult roles in supporting families. Often, children can earn more money than adults. However, they live extraordinarily difficult lives of danger and poverty.
8. What are the major trends in urbanization? The world is becoming increasingly urbanized. More than half of the world's population currently lives in cities, and that number is expected to double in the next four decades. In the future, most of the world's largest cities will be in poor countries. Providing services to poor people in these cities is beyond the financial capacity of many nations.
9. In what ways does urbanization change culture? The mass migration of people to cities tends to diminish cultural differences. Some cultural practices cannot be performed in cities. Others are lost as people attempt to blend in. However, bringing people together in cities also allows new cultural trends to emerge
10. Is overpopulation a critical problem? Overpopulation is an important problem because, in some areas, subsistence strategies have collapsed. It has also led to increased urbanization. However, historically, population increase and prosperity have often gone hand in hand. Also, the appropriate level of human population for any area is a political question involving assumptions about distribution of resources and the types of environments people consider desirable.
11. What was China's one-child policy and was it successful? China's one-child policy was a series of laws limiting families to a single child in most cases. Fertility dropped dramatically in China from

the 1980s to the 2010s. However, fertility also dropped in nearby countries that did not have similar policies. Fertility seems to be closely linked to urbanization and wealth. As both of these increase, fertility declines, with or without government policies.

12. How severe are the environmental problems facing humanity and how do they relate to poverty? Environmental problems are extremely severe. As global wealth has grown, so have issues of waste, pollution, and global warming. These may now be the biggest problems humanity faces. Such problems particularly affect the poor. Although the poor consume only a small portion of the world’s production, they live in some of its most polluted environments. Global warming is anticipated to have more dire effects in poor countries because many of these countries are located in ecologically fragile zones that have limited financial resources to cope with environmental change.
13. What are some of the most significant problems facing indigenous people in the current-day world? Most indigenous people are incorporated into nations and therefore do not have full control of their lands. They are pushed into global market participation by disruption of earlier subsistence patterns and pulled into globalization by desire for consumer goods and some aspects of modern-day lifestyle. Although the UN and most nations officially support self-determination and rights for indigenous people, many nations are unwilling or unable to enforce these rights. Even in countries where indigenous rights are supported, conflict is common.
14. What are the prospects for the future of humanity? In “The Global and the Local” section, we see that despite the difficulties facing us, the future is not necessarily bleak. Anthropology gives us the tools to deal with a world characterized by diversity and instructs us that humans are cultural beings. Cultures can be changed and perhaps improved. For humans, biology is never destiny.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How have political and economic changes since the end of World War II affected cultures around the world?
2. What are the likely effects of the increasing size and power of multinational corporations on world politics? Will the enormous power of these corporations result in a more homogenous world?
3. Are education programs likely to be effective in controlling world population growth? What types of policies may increase or decrease population growth?
4. How can the demands of people for increased prosperity and better standards of living be balanced with the environmental problems that the consumption of high levels of goods and energy creates?
5. Many people argue governments should assure that indigenous people can determine their own future. What are the advantages and disadvantages to this approach? What are possible alternatives to it?
6. Summarize the important ways in which anthropology can help us understand today's world and help us plan for the future.

Key Terms

basic human needs approach (p. 462)

demographic transition (p. 475)

Development

gross national income (GNI) (p. 475)

indigenous peoples (p. 475)

modernization theory (p. 457)

multinational corporation (p. 463)

structural adjustment (p. 457)

Sweatshops (p. 463)

World Bank (p. 459)

Notes

1. See Powell and Zwolinski 2012 “The Ethical and Economic Case Against Sweatshop Labor: A Critical Assessment,” and Coakley and Kates 2013 “The Ethical and Economic Case for Sweatshop Regulation” for analyses of the philosophical and economic implications of sweatshop labor.

Descriptions of Images and Figures

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The horizontal axis are labeled years 1981, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2010, and 2019. The vertical axis is labeled percentage values from 0 to 70 in increments of 10. The line graphs are marked for the following which shows that the population living in extreme poverty has fallen around the world.

Sub-Saharan Africa: 55% in 1990, rise a little, and falls to 40% in 2019.

South Asia: 59% in 1981, and falls to 17% in 2015.

World: 42% in 1981, and falls to 10% in 2019.

Middle East and North Africa: 8% in 1982, and reach 9% in 2019.

Latin America and the Caribbean: 12% in 1981, and falls to 3% in 2019.

Europe and Central Asia: 1% in 1990, and falls to 0.1% in 2019.

East Asia and Pacific: Above 70% in 1981, and falls to 0.5% in 2017.

Other high Income (World Bank): Keeps steady.

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A globe at the top depicts Brazil. To its bottom in a box is a map with labels of regions Venezuela, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, Fr. Guiana, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay. Brazil is shaded and Brasilia is starred. Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Olinda are circled. The Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean are depicted and a scale of 0 to 500 km is given to its bottom.

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The horizontal axis are labeled years 10,000 BCE, 6,000 BCE, 4,000 BCE, 2,000 BCE, 0 and 2021. The vertical axis is labeled values from 0 to 7 billion in increments of 1 billion. The line graphs are marked for the continents from bottom to top as Oceania, South America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the World. The value starts off less than 1 billion for the whole world from 2,000 BCE. By 2021, from bottom the values are less than 1 billion till Europe, for Africa, it reaches 1.5 billion, for Asia, it crossed 4.75 billion making the whole world cross 7 billion.

APPENDIX: A BRIEF HISTORICAL GUIDE TO ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

People have probably been curious about their neighbors since the emergence of the species *Homo sapiens*. They have investigated these neighbors systematically in many places and at many times. However, for our purposes, we may date the origins of anthropology as an intellectual and academic discipline to the beginning of the 19th century. The word *anthropologist* was first used in print in 1805 in *The Edinburgh Review* (Kuklick, 1991:, p. 6). Since that time, numerous different theoretical schools have appeared, each related to its predecessors, but each with its own understanding of the critical issues that surround the analysis of culture. In this appendix, we provide very brief chronological descriptions of the principal schools of anthropological thought and introduce some of the key thinkers in each school.

19TH-CENTURY EVOLUTIONISM

Various forms of social evolutionary theory held sway throughout most of the 19th century. These theories were loosely based on evolutionary models drawn from biology, particularly the work of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829) and Charles Darwin (1809–1882). Lamarck is best known for his notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. He argued that organs improve with repeated use and grow weak with disuse and that living things are able to pass these strengths and weaknesses on to their offspring. Lamarck reasoned that over time, this process would give rise to new species. Darwin, on the other hand, showed that chance endowed certain individuals with traits that allowed them to produce relatively more offspring and that such individuals were able to pass along these successful traits to their offspring. Darwin’s theory accurately describes biological evolution. However, cultural and social change may happen in the ways Lamarck characterized. Humans *do* pass cultural traits acquired during their lifetimes to their offspring. Synthesizing these ideas, 19th-century anthropologists argued that the history of humanity could be described as progress toward increasingly complex forms of society. This progress followed discoverable natural laws and could be understood by using scientific methodology.

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was a key early thinker in social evolutionism. He compared societies to biological organisms and proposed that both progressed by increasing in complexity. Although much of Spencer’s theoretical position was established before Darwin published his theory of natural selection, Spencer rapidly incorporated some elements of Darwin’s work into his own.

The Englishman Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and the American Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) both proposed that all human societies progressed from a state of savagery, through barbarism, to civilization. Societies progressed at different speeds, however. Western European and European American societies had achieved the fastest progress. Others, such as the Australian Aborigines, had been left far behind in savagery. Although from our perspective, this notion is profoundly ethnocentric, it is important to point out that the evolutionary anthropological theorists were deeply critical of their own societies, particularly the entrenched hereditary privilege of the aristocracy and upper classes.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) viewed evolution in terms of conflict between different social groups, usually classes. For Marx and Engels, understanding the way that societies produced their livelihoods was the key to social analysis. People organized to produce, but these forms of organization divided people and created conflict. Evolution was the historical working out of this conflict in a series of stages separated by revolutionary change. The works of Marx and Engels left a deep imprint on anthropology.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) wrote in the 20th century but drew largely on 19th-century sources. He saw evolution as a mental process and believed that the psychological development of the individual mirrored that of human society. The children of the “civilized” were thus the emotional equals of adult “savages.” Although almost all anthropologists rejected the evolutionary aspects of Freud’s work, it incorporated many elements of his ideas about sexuality, repression, and the importance of childhood.

THE EARLY SOCIOLOGISTS

The key sociological thinker in turn-of-the-century France was Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). Durkheim believed that each group of people shared a collective conscience that included a shared system of understandings, beliefs, and values that molded and constrained individual behavior. This notion was similar to what many anthropologists today call culture. Durkheim thought that the collective conscience had an existence independent of the people who shared it. It was something that operated by its own laws and could be studied on its own terms. The task of sociologists was to discover the contents of the collective conscience (which Durkheim believed included social facts and collective representations) and the laws by which its elements functioned. One of the key laws that Durkheim believed he discovered was that the human mind divided things into opposites. The most basic of these divisions was between the sacred and the profane.

Durkheim and his students are often referred to as L’Année Sociologique school, after a journal they published that reviewed each year’s developments in sociology. Durkheim’s students were some of the brightest minds of Europe, including his nephew Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) and Robert Hertz (1881–1915). Sadly, most of Durkheim’s students died fighting in World War I.

Whereas Durkheim and his students focused on questions of social cohesion or solidarity, Max Weber (1864–1920) was more concerned with conflict. Weber was profoundly influenced by Marx, but he did not believe that social classes necessarily acted in solidarity. Weber is also known for promoting the notion that social scientists must develop empathetic understanding of those they study to understand their behavior.

BOAS AND AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY

In the United States, much of anthropology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was devoted to the attempt to find scientific justifications for institutionalized racism. The German-trained scholar Franz Boas (1858–1942) created a new American anthropology that was utterly opposed to this thinking. Boas asserted that all human beings were biological equals and that differences among human societies were the result of culture alone. The form each culture took depended almost entirely on its own specific history (Boas's position was sometimes called historical *particularism*, a term coined long after his death) rather than on any panhuman pattern of development, as the evolutionists proposed. Boas went on to debunk many 19th-century thinkers, demonstrating that the cultural traits they believed showed a universal pattern of human development actually arose from quite different sources and histories.

The claim that cultures were *sui generis*, or created by their own histories, had important implications. First, it meant that cultures could be evaluated only on their own terms rather than by using any universal yardstick of development. Therefore, cultural relativism became a cornerstone of Boasian anthropology. Second, though Boas wrote that controlled cultural comparison was possible and general laws of growth could be found (1896/1988), his insistence that each culture was the unique result of its history and context suggests that this would be virtually impossible. Formulating general laws requires comparing similar elements of different cultures. However, such comparison necessarily removes elements from their historical and social context and thus violates Boasian principles. Boas and his students assiduously avoided making such comparisons or proposing general laws. Instead, Boasians focused on collecting ethnographic data through fieldwork and explaining cultural patterns as the result of culture, history, and psychology.

Boas's influence on American anthropology was extraordinary. During his long career at Columbia University, he trained many of the most important American anthropologists of the first half of the 20th century, including A. L. Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, Paul Radin, and Ashley Montagu.

FUNCTIONALISM

In Europe, the trauma of World War I led to the abandonment of social evolutionism. However, many of the ideas of Spencer and Durkheim were retained in British functionalism. Like Spencer, functionalists tended to view societies as analogous to biological organisms. Instead of being interested in their evolution, however, functionalists were concerned with the operations of each part of society and the relations among these parts.

Two critical thinkers in functionalism were A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942). Radcliffe-Brown is associated with structural functionalism. Profoundly influenced by his reading of Durkheim, he wanted to discern and describe the role of social structure, particularly institutions such as kinship, in maintaining the smooth working of society and preserving social solidarity. Malinowski's psychological functionalism focused on human physical and psychological needs. He proposed seven universal human needs: nutrition, reproduction, bodily comfort, safety, relaxation, movement, and growth. He examined cultural institutions in terms of how they functioned to meet these needs. Malinowski is also known for his pioneering use of participant observation and empathy as well as his vivid descriptions of Pacific Island culture.

Although their theoretical positions were very different, Boas and Malinowski shared some interesting similarities. Like Boas, Malinowski set extremely high standards for fieldwork among his students. Also like Boas, Malinowski trained many important anthropologists, including E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Audrey Richards, and Raymond Firth, during his long academic career at the London School of Economics.

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

Boas transmitted to his students his insistence on the historical uniqueness of each culture, but he did not give them any unifying principle around which to organize their work. To remedy this, many of them turned to the notion of personality. Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), Margaret Mead (1901–1978), and others analyzed culture as “personality writ large.” They believed that each culture had a unique configuration that shaped the personality of its members, molding them to fit the culture’s dominant type. Benedict, for example, characterized the Zuni as reserved and level-headed. She argued that they avoided excesses of any kind. She referred to this complex of traits as an Apollonian cultural configuration.

To solve the problem of how cultural configurations were formed and maintained, culture and personality theorists, particularly Abram Kardiner (1891–1981) and Cora DuBois (1903–1991), turned to Freud. Although they rejected Freud’s evolutionary theories, they accepted the notion that early childhood experiences determine later life personality. Thus, they saw child-rearing practices as critical to understanding cultural institutions.

With the coming of World War II, the culture and personality theorists turned to writing national character studies of the United States and its allies and opponents. These works, produced by analyzing written data rather than fieldwork, were substantially less successful than their earlier efforts. Although few anthropologists today would consider themselves culture and personality theorists, some of the best-known books in 20th-century American anthropology are associated with this school of thought. These include Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928/1971) and *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive*

Societies (1935/1963) and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934/1961).

CULTURAL ECOLOGY AND NEO-EVOLUTIONISM

By the mid-1930s, a second school of American anthropological thought emerged to compete with the ideas of Boas and his intellectual descendants. Cultural ecology and neo-evolutionism reevaluated the insights of the 19th-century evolutionists and, through new research, attempted to raise their scientific standards. Key thinkers in this enterprise were Julian Steward (1902–1972), Leslie White (1900–1975), and George Peter Murdock (1897–1985). All three searched for general laws of cultural development.

Steward, who coined the term *cultural ecology*, was particularly interested in the relationship between culture and environment. He believed that cultures at similar technological levels in similar environments would develop broadly similar institutions. His work thus depended on cross-cultural comparisons.

Leslie White was deeply influenced by his reading of Morgan and Marx. This led him to a concern with cultural evolution and the nature of production. He proposed that cultures evolve as the amount of energy they capture increases, an idea known as White's law. White believed that revolutionary changes in technology were critical to increasing the ability to capture energy.

George Peter Murdock was an intellectual descendant of Spencer. He believed that general principles of culture could be derived from cross-cultural analysis on a massive scale. Thus, he began a project to index and tabulate information on all the world's known cultures. This project, known as the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), still continues today.

NEOMATERIALISM: EVOLUTIONARY, FUNCTIONALIST, ECOLOGICAL, AND MARXIST

Steward, White, Murdock, and others set the stage for many of the anthropological theorists of the 1960s and 1970s. These theorists combined earlier anthropological work with insights from the physical and biological sciences and, sometimes, a deep understanding and appropriation of Marxist thought.

Evolutionary theorists such as Morton Fried (1923–1986), Marshall Sahlins (1930–), and Elman Service (1915– 1996) looked for ways to combine the insights of Steward and White into a single theory of cultural evolution. They developed the band–tribe–chiefdom–state model commonly used in much of modern anthropology (see Chapter 8).

Ecological functionalists took the position that cultures were adaptations that permitted their members to exploit their environments successfully. They examined the ways in which cultural practices were related to physical, technological, and economic aspects of the environment. Marvin Harris (1927–2001) used the term *cultural materialism* to describe this approach. Harris's analysis of Indian cattle worship (see Chapter 3) is a good example.

Neo-Marxists were a third group of thinkers within this tradition. Most neo-Marxists were especially concerned with issues of political economy, particularly colonialism, international economic relations, and, more recently, globalization. Their approaches to these issues varied. In Europe, French scholars such as Claude Meillassoux (1925–2005) and Maurice Godelier (1934–) broke with the Soviet scholars who had dominated Marxist anthropology and proposed new ways of adapting Marx's critical insights to the anthropology of nonindustrial society. In the United States, political economy theorists led by Eric Wolf (1923–1999) focused on the historical development of capitalism and the conflicts it generated. Wolf and others rejected the notion of cultures as bounded wholes that could be studied independently. They urged anthropologists to see issues of conflict, domination of one group by another, and appropriation of wealth as central to understanding culture.

STRUCTURALISM

Structural anthropology is based largely on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Lévi-Strauss was inspired by Durkheim’s work on the nature of human thought as well as advances made in linguistics in the first half of the 20th century. At that time, linguists were concerned with identifying the most fundamental units of language. In a similar fashion, Lévi-Strauss sought to uncover the basic units of culture and the rules by which they operated.

Lévi-Strauss believed that the same basic units and rules of culture found expression in all societies. He reasoned that these could best be discovered through analysis of the folktales and mythologies of primitive people. Like Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss held that the most fundamental rule of culture is the tendency of human thinking to make binary distinctions. He proposed, however, that human thinking is not satisfied with such distinctions and always adds a third category that in some way transcends or reconciles the opposition. The process of structural anthropology involves analyzing cultures to show fundamental oppositions as well as the elements that transcend them. Lévi-Strauss hoped that as this process was completed for more and more cultures, general patterns would emerge, illuminating the fundamental patternings that underlie all human culture.

Although Lévi-Strauss’s ideas have always been controversial, structural anthropology has proven a useful source of insight into the interpretation of the symbolic aspects of culture. It has had a profound effect not only on anthropology but on thinking in literature, political science, and psychology as well. Not surprisingly, this impact was felt first and most strongly in France. Some of the scholars strongly influenced by Lévi-Strauss include Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, although many of these were critical of structuralism as well. Scholars such as these were fundamental to the poststructuralist and postmodern anthropology of the United States in the 1980s and 1990s.

ETHNOSCIENCE AND COGNITIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

Ethnoscience and cognitive anthropology were largely American developments. Some of the key scholars associated with these approaches are Ward Goodenough (1919–2013), Harold Conklin (1926–2016), James Spradley (1933–1981), Roy D'Andrade (1931–2016), and Naomi Quinn (1939–2019). Ethnoscience is based on a critique of anthropological method but draws heavily on Boasian anthropology and structuralism.

Ethnoscientists and cognitive anthropologists claimed that existing anthropological reporting was unreliable because anthropology lacked consistent methodology. Projects such as Murdock's HRAF were flawed because different ethnographers observed and reported on differing aspects of the societies they studied. Thus, generalizations about cultures could not be made. Ethnoscientists and cognitive anthropologists proposed a way around this dilemma. They asserted that culture was a shared mental model through which people organized their world. Further, they claimed that language was the key means through which this organization was accomplished. Thus, the distinctions that people made in speaking could be used to construct a model for each culture.

Ethnoscientists and cognitive anthropologists developed a fieldwork method designed to discover the linguistic models that members of different cultures used to classify their worlds. They claimed fieldwork done using this method would be consistent and would provide anthropologists the information needed to behave like members of the culture. Some suggested that a person who fully understood the mental model of another culture could think like a member of that culture as well, though this was hotly disputed.

Ethnoscientists and cognitive anthropologists believed that each culture had a unique mental model. Like Boas, they argued that given enough time and data collection, some universal theory of culture might emerge. However, such a theory was only a long-term possibility.

In the 1980s and 1990s, cognitive anthropologists turned away from the linguistic model. Realizing that many forms of knowledge and behavior did not involve linguistic processing, they began to look at insights from psychology and physiology. The result was the emergence of schema theory and connectivism. Schema theory describes knowledge in terms of generalized representations of experiences, events, and objects that are stored in memory. Connectivists argue that knowledge is structured in “processing units,” and they examine the ways in which such units might be distributed, linked, and networked. Current cognitive anthropologists are interested in how the organization of cultural schemas is related to the physiology of the brain and the ways in which cultural knowledge is learned, shared, and distributed.

SOCIOBIOLOGY, EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY, AND BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY

Perhaps the most controversial theoretical position in anthropology is sociobiology. It was developed and promoted largely by biologists and anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of its key thinkers include biologists W. D. Hamilton (1936–2000), Robert Trivers (1943–), and E. O. Wilson (1929–2021); sociologist Lionel Tiger (1937–); and anthropologists Lee Cronk, Rebecca Bleige Bird, Robin Fox (1934–), and Napoleon Chagnon (1938–2019).

Sociobiologists applied the Darwinian idea of natural selection directly to human cultural behavior. They believed that culture reflected an underlying genetic patterning. Further, as in biology, those genetically based culture traits that led to increased reproduction would be selected and transmitted and thus would increasingly appear in the population. Therefore, they viewed much of cultural behavior as a mechanism through which individuals tried to increase their chances of reproduction.

In the 1970s, sociobiologists were particularly concerned with the problem of altruism, defined as an individual’s sacrifice of their own reproductive chances to benefit those of another, and they tried to show how such a trait could evolve. In the 1980s and 1990s, sociobiologists split into three groups: evolutionary psychologists, human behavioral ecologists, and those who study human universals. Evolutionary psychologists theorize that the mind is composed of a collection of specialized suborgans designed for particular tasks. They try to describe these suborgans and show what they were designed to accomplish. Human behavioral ecologists emphasize human populations rather than cultures and try to test the hypothesis that culturally patterned traits enhance fitness. Some anthropologists focus on discovering and describing human universals, or characteristics found in all societies.

Sociobiologists have insisted that understanding the connections between biology and culture should be the focus of anthropology. Most cultural anthropologists, however, believe that culture is almost completely independent of biology. As a result, sociobiology has been strongly criticized by cultural anthropologists.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND GENDER

The feminist critique of anthropology developed along with the women’s movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. Until this period, despite the fact that some very prominent anthropologists had been women, anthropology in general had been overwhelmingly concerned with men’s activities. Though women constituted half the population, they were often invisible in ethnographic writing. Feminist anthropologists such as Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1944–1981), Louise Lamphere (1940–), Sherry Ortner (1941–), and Micaela di Leonardo (1949–) tried to rectify this situation by focusing attention on women's worlds.

Feminist anthropologists actually took many different theoretical positions, from structuralism to neo-Marxism to postmodernism. However, they all shared an interest in women's position in society. Much of feminist anthropology in the 1970s was concerned with trying to explain female subordination, which some scholars considered to be universal. More recently, feminist anthropologists have focused on the social construction of gender; the relationship of gender to social, economic, and political power; and the cultural variation among different groups of women. They have been joined by others who focus on gay, lesbian, and transgender populations. Some prominent anthropologists interested in these issues are William Leap (1946–), Tom Boellstorff (1969–), Ellen Lewin (1946–), and Tanya Erzen (1972–). The organizing theme that holds these disparate interests together is the idea that gender and relations among genders are a central patterning element of society. Understanding society involves elucidating gender relationships and showing the effect these relationships have on other aspects of culture.

SYMBOLIC AND INTERPRETIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

Like ethnoscientists and cognitive anthropologists, symbolic and interpretive anthropologists are fundamentally concerned with the ways in which people formulate their reality. However, unlike the former, who thought of culture in terms of formal linguistic models, symbolic and interpretive anthropologists use models from psychology and the study of literary texts to analyze culture. Some major figures in this group are Clifford Geertz (1926–2006), Mary Douglas (1921–2007), and Victor Turner (1920–1983). Geertz, one of the best-known modern-day anthropologists, believed that people use symbols to help them understand their own culture. Culture is like a story that people tell themselves about themselves, and in so doing, they give meaning and poignancy to their lives. Turner, on the other hand, followed the tradition of Durkheim and British functionalist anthropology, viewing symbols in terms of their role in the maintenance of society. He was particularly interested in the study of ritual and outlined the characteristics of symbols. Douglas also drew inspiration from her reading of Durkheim. She suggested that shared symbols helped hold societies together. Douglas was particularly interested in beliefs about purity and contamination and held that such notions symbolized beliefs about the social order.

Historically, most anthropologists have argued that their theoretical positions rest on scientific principles. Symbolic and interpretive anthropologists make no such claim. Rather, they suggest that anthropology is an art of cultural interpretation, more of a branch of the humanities than a science. Its goal is often to provide people with a deep, empathic understanding of the nature of meaning to members of different cultures rather than to discover general principles or testable laws.

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism in anthropology grew from the insights of the feminist anthropologists, interpretive and symbolic anthropologists, and neo-Marxists, but its development was critically dependent on the thinking of French philosophers, historians, and literary critics. These included Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), and Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998). Anthropological postmodernists hold that all accounts of culture are partial and conditioned by the observer’s personal history and experiences. One result, according to postmodernists, is that anthropological writing tells us a great deal about anthropologists and their society but rather little about the societies that anthropologists observe.

Issues of power and “voice” are critical to postmodern scholars. They assert that a great many different interpretations of history or culture are valid. The interpretations held by the wealthy and powerful are likely to be considered legitimate, while others are discredited. For postmodernists, culture is often viewed as a constant battle between opposing, contesting interpretations. Some, such as Renato Rosaldo (1941-), focus on explanations of culture that highlight conflicting interpretations. Others, such as Vincent Crapanzano (1939–) and Gananath Obeyesekere (1930–), study anthropological writing itself. They analyze ethnographies to show the ways in which they are constructed and explain what they tell us about anthropologists and Western society.

At its most radical, postmodernism asserts that objectivity is impossible, implying that no interpretation or analysis can ever be better or worse than another. If this is the case, fieldwork is irrelevant and anthropology should be understood as a branch of literature, less accurate than fiction because of its pretensions to authority and fact. For these reasons, many anthropologists have been loud in their denunciation of postmodernism. Critics assert that for anthropology to be useful, it must be based on a scientific model of study rather than a literary one. However, even postmodernism's detractors would agree that it has made anthropologists more sensitive to how knowledge is generated in anthropology and to issues of whose story they are telling and their own motivations and agendas in telling that story.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND GLOBALIZATION

Changes in politics and economics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have led anthropologists to theorize globalization in several different ways. Globalization theories combine elements of Marxist thinking with approaches from cognitive and anthropology and gender. They focus on the ways in which the connections between societies both pattern and change culture and the ways in which individuals and societies navigate and negotiate identity, economy, and politics within the context of global connectedness and inequality. Several different theoretical threads have emerged. One of the first spokespeople for this school of thought is Arjun Appadurai (1949–). Appadurai's influential 1996 book *Modernity at Large* envisioned the cultural world as composed of a series of overlapping "scapes," or understandings of reality, that are at the same time physical, virtual, and cognitive. Appadurai distinguishes five "scapes": ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes.

Appadurai, along with fellow globalization theorist Ulf Hannerz (1942–), is a cautious optimist, focusing on the ways in which global interconnections are linked to improvisation and cultural creativity. Other globalization theorists are far more pessimistic. Jonathan Friedman (1946–) and Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (1939–), for example, focus on globalization as an aspect of deep history. They view the world as subject to historical waves of increasing and decreasing international integration. They see the emphasis on globalization found among Western elites as a sign of the declining economic fortunes of western Europe and North America and the increasing power of Asian societies. Akhil Gupta (1959–), another prominent theorist of globalization, has focused on the relationship between the state and multinational corporations and how this relationship affects the experiences of peasants and marginalized groups in the world capitalist economy.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY: PRACTICE THEORY APPROACHES

The position of the individual with respect to society has always been problematic in anthropology. On the one hand, anthropologists have ignored individuals as they searched for general principles. One anthropologist famously claimed that individuals had no more influence on culture than "a sack of sawdust." However, on the other hand, some anthropologists focused on individual experience and clearly hoped that individuals could influence culture. In the 1980s, anthropologists began to focus on theorizing the role of the individual with respect to society. The works of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) and Anthony Giddens (1938–) were central to this effort. Both of these theorists focused on the relationship between the individual’s life experience and the social structures within which these experiences occurred. Bourdieu developed the idea of *habitus*, which he famously described as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to serve as structuring structures” (1990:, p. 53). What he meant was that all people live and act within sociocultural frameworks. These frameworks both provide the possibilities for our actions and weight those possibilities in specific ways. However, within those frameworks, individuals do have possibilities and choices. They are guided by their individual life histories and experiences and, perhaps, by inborn temperamental predispositions as well. This freedom within structure is referred to as agency.

In American anthropology, Sherry Ortner (who also appears in the “anthropology and gender” section of this appendix) has been one of the foremost spokespeople for practice theory. The approach is perhaps best represented in her 2006 book *Anthropology and Social Theory*. Many other anthropologists have also been strongly influenced by this approach. Ruth Gomberg-Munoz (1975–) uses it masterfully in her work on Mexican immigrants in Chicago, as does Holly Wardlow (1965–) in her work on kinship and sex work among Huli women in Papua New Guinea. Practice theory is compelling in anthropology because it gives anthropologists a framework within which they can analyze the pressures and conflicts within social structures while at the same time paying attention to the rich details of individual lives.

The brief analysis of anthropological theories in this appendix has been presented in rough order of their historical appearance. This can be deceptive because it seems to imply that one theory simply supersedes another. For example, the fact that postmodernism appears after anthropology and gender might lead you to believe that anthropologists abandoned anthropology and gender and took up postmodernism. This is not the case at all. In some sense, all these theories are alive and well. Although very few people today would call themselves historical particularists or psychological functionalists, the problems, issues, and insights that informed these schools of thought are still with us. Debates echoing the discussions of earlier times repeatedly occur both in anthropology and in broader public discourse. Today, anthropologists disagree, often virulently, about the best ways to analyze culture, the importance of different aspects of culture, the role of biology and evolution in culture, and even what the goals of anthropology should be. This debate is the sign of a healthy, complex, and intellectually challenging discipline. It generates new ways of looking at culture, new understandings of human diversity, and, perhaps, new possibilities for humanity.

GLOSSARY

achieved status:
a social position that is substantially based on life experiences.

adaptation:
a change in the biological structure or lifeways of an individual or population by which it becomes better fitted to survive and reproduce in its environment.

affinal:
relatives by marriage; in-laws.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE):
a form of English spoken by many African Americans, particularly those of rural or urban working-class backgrounds.

agriculture:
a subsistence strategy in which fields are in permanent cultivation using plows, animals, and techniques of soil and water control.

allophones:
two or more different phones that can be used to make the same phoneme in a specific language.

ambilineal descent:
a form of bilateral descent in which an individual may choose to affiliate with either their father’s or mother’s descent group.

animatism:
Belief in an impersonal spiritual force that infuses the universe.

anime:
Animation, as in the popular culture of Japan; usually refers to the animation of manga, or comic book graphic art.

animism:
The notion that all objects, living and nonliving, are imbued with spirits.

anthropological theory:
a set of propositions about which aspects of culture are critical, how these aspects should be studied, and what the goal of studying them should be.

anthropology:
the comparative study of human societies and cultures.

antistructure:
The socially sanctioned use of behavior that radically violates social norms. Antistructure is frequently found in religious rituals.

applied anthropology:
the use of anthropology in both public and private sectors to solve real-world problems.

archaeology:
the study of past cultures through their material remains.

arranged marriage:
the process by which senior family members exercise a great degree of control over the choice of their children’s spouses.

artifacts:
(nonverbal communication) forms of body ornamentation or modification that communicate messages about individual or group identity.

arts:
Forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles and involve imagination, skill, and style.

ascribed status:
a social position based entirely on birth.

assimilation:

a process through which immigrants were expected to abandon their distinctive cultures in favor of an American identity.

authority:

the ability to cause others to act based on characteristics such as honor, status, knowledge, ability, respect, or the holding of formal public office.

avunculocal residence:

system under which a married couple lives with the husband’s mother’s brother.

balanced reciprocity:

the giving and receiving of goods of nearly equal value with a clear obligation of a return gift within a specified time limit.

band:

a small group of people related by blood or marriage, who live together and are loosely associated with a territory in which they forage.

basic human needs approach:

Projects aimed at providing access to clean water, education, and health care for the poorest of the world’s people.

bhangra:

A musical form that originated in the folk music of Punjab in northern India and eastern Pakistan; bhangra is being mixed with British pop music and reggae and has become a popular form of world music.

bifurcation:

a principle of classifying kin under which different kinship terms are used for the mother’s side of the family and the father’s side of the family.

bigman:

a self-made leader who gains power through personal achievements rather than through political office.

bigmen:
self-made leaders who gain power and authority through personal achievement.

bilateral descent:
system of descent under which individuals are equally affiliated with their mothers' and their fathers' descent group.

biological (or physical) anthropology:
the study of humankind from a biological perspective.

blended families:
kinship networks occasioned by divorce and remarriage in the United States that include the previously divorced spouses and their new marriage partners as well as stepsiblings and half-siblings.

bound morpheme:
a unit of meaning that must be associated with another.

bride service:
the cultural rule that a man must work for his bride's family for a variable length of time either before or after the marriage.

bridewealth:
goods presented by the groom's kin to the bride's kin to legitimize a marriage (formerly called bride price).

call system:
the form of communication among nonhuman primates composed of a limited number of sounds that are tied to specific stimuli in the environment.

capital:
productive resources that are used with the primary goal of

increasing their owner’s financial wealth.

cargo system:
a ritual system common in Central and South America in which wealthy people are required to hold a series of costly ceremonial offices.

caste:
an endogamous, ranked, and permanent group based on ascribed status.

caste system:
social stratification based on birth or ascribed status in which social mobility between castes is not possible.

chiefdom:
a society with social ranking in which political integration is achieved through an office of centralized leadership called the chief.

chronemics:
the study of the different ways that cultures understand time and use it to communicate.

civilizing mission:
The notion that colonialism was a duty for Europeans and a benefit for the colonized.

clan:
a unilineal kinship group whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor but who cannot trace this link through known relatives.

class:
a category of people who all have about the same opportunity to obtain economic resources, power, and prestige and who are ranked relative to other categories.

class system:
a form of social stratification in which the different strata form a continuum and social mobility is possible.

code-switching:
the ability of individuals who speak multiple languages to move seamlessly between them.

collaborative anthropologists:
practice an ethnography that gives priority to informants on the topic, methodology, and written results of research.

collateral kin:
kin descended from a common ancestor but not in a direct ascendant or descendent line, such as siblings and cousins.

colonialism:
The active possession of foreign territory and the maintenance of political domination over that territory.

colonies:
Territories under the immediate political control of a nation-state.

communication:
the act of transmitting information.

communitas:
A state of perceived solidarity, equality, and unity among people sharing a religious ritual, often characterized by intense emotion.

comparative linguistics:
the science of documenting the relationships between languages and grouping them into language families.

composite (compound) family:
an aggregate of nuclear families linked by a common spouse.

conflict theory of social stratification:

a perspective on social stratification that focuses on economic inequality as a source of conflict and change.

consanguine:

a relationship by descent. Used by anthropologists to describe those people believed to be genetically related to one another.

contagious magic:

The belief that things once in contact with a person or object retain an invisible connection with that person or object.

conventionality:

the notion that in human language, words are only arbitrarily or conventionally connected to the things for which they stand.

core vocabulary:

a group of words that designate things, actions, and activities likely to be named in all the world's languages.

corvée labor:

Unpaid labor required by a governing authority.

cosmology:

A system of beliefs that deals with fundamental questions in the religious and social order.

creole:

a first language that is composed of elements of two or more different languages. (Compare with pidgin.)

cross-cousins:

the children of a parent's siblings of the opposite sex (mother's brothers, father's sisters).

cultural anthropology:

the study of human society and culture. Cultural anthropologists focus on current-day culture and the cultures, as well as cultures of the recent past.

cultural relativism:

the idea that a people's values and customs must be understood in terms of the culture to which they belong.

culture:

the major way in which human beings adapt to their environments and give meaning to their lives.

culture shock:

feelings of alienation and helplessness that result from rapid immersion in a new and different culture.

deep play:

descent:

the culturally established affiliation between a child and one or both parents.

descent group:

a group of kin who are descendants of a common ancestor, extending beyond two generations.

descriptive or structural linguistics:

the study and analysis of the structure and content of particular languages.

Development:

The notion that some countries are poor because they have small industrial plants and few lines of communication; the belief is they should pursue wealth by acquiring these and other things.

dialect:

grammatical constructions that deviate from those used by the socially dominant group in a society.

diffusion:

the tendency of innovations to move from one culture to another.

displacement:
the capacity of all human languages to describe things not happening in the present.

divination:
A religious ritual performed to find hidden objects or information.

division of labor:
the pattern by which different tasks are given to different members of a society.

double descent:
the tracing of descent through both matrilineal and patrilineal links, each of which is used for different purposes.

dowry:
presentation of goods by the bride’s kin to the family of the groom or to the couple.

Dutch East India Company:
A joint stock company chartered by the Dutch government to control all Dutch trade in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Also known by its Dutch initials, VOC, for Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie.

economizing behavior:
choosing a course of action to maximize perceived benefit.

egalitarian society:
a society in which no individual or group has more privileged access to resources than any other.

emic (perspective):
a perspective that attempts to capture the meaning of ideas and practices to members of a culture.

enculturation:
the process of learning to be a member of a particular cultural

group.

endogamy:
a rule prescribing that a person must marry within a particular group.

engaged anthropology:
anthropology that includes political action as a major goal of fieldwork.

ethnicity:
Perceived differences, such as culture, religion, language, and national origin, by which groups of people distinguish themselves and are distinguished by others.

ethnocentrism:
the idea that one’s own culture is superior to any other.

ethnography:
the description of society or culture.

ethnology:
is the attempt to find general principles or laws that govern culture.

etic (perspective):
a perspective that focuses on understanding culture according to principles drawn from Western scientific traditions.

exogamy:
a rule specifying that a person must marry outside a particular group.

extended family:
family based on blood relations extending over three or more generations.

fieldwork:
the firsthand, systematic exploration of a society. It involves living

with a group of people and participating in and observing their behavior.

firm:

an institution composed of kin and/or nonkin that is organized primarily for financial gain.

foraging (hunting and gathering):

a subsistence strategy that depends on the use of plant and animal resources available in the environment and involves no conscious effort to alter the environment.

fraternal polyandry:

a custom whereby a woman marries a man and his brothers.

free morpheme:

a unit of meaning that may stand alone as a word.

functionalism (functionalist perspective):

the anthropological theory that specific cultural institutions function to support the structure of a society or serve the needs of its people.

functionalist theory of social stratificatoin:

the theory that social stratification generally benefits the whole society by rewarding people socially and economically for working harder.

gender:

(linguistics) a system of agreement classes found in some languages. Gender classes usually govern agreement between nouns, pronouns, and adjectives.

gender:

A cultural construction that makes biological and physical differences between male and female into socially meaningful categories.

gender ideology:
The totality of ideas about sex, gender, and the natures of men and women within a culture.

gender roles:
Behaviors that societies consider appropriate for people of different sexes.

generalized reciprocity:
giving and receiving goods with no immediate or specific return expected.

Ghost Dance:
A Native American religious movement of the late 19th century.

gig economy:
the labor market that consists of short-term, freelance work rather than permanent jobs.

glottochronology:
a statistical technique that linguists have developed to estimate the date of separation of related languages.

god:
A named spirit who is believed to have created or to control some aspect of the world.

gross national income (GNI):
The total value of all goods and services produced in a country.

habitus:
the often taken-for-granted ways of acting that are acquired through both individual and social experience.

haptics:
the analysis and study of touch.

hegemony:

the dominance of a political elite based on a close identification between their own goals and those of the larger society.

hijab:

A headscarf worn by some Muslim women that loosely covers their hair and neck. Some Muslims and many non-Muslim Westerners see the hijab as a sign of the oppression of women. But often, Muslim women view the hijab as a liberating garment that forces the world to see them as more than sexual objects and establishes their identity as Muslims.

hijra:

An alternative gender role in India conceptualized as neither man nor woman.

holistic/holism:

in anthropology, combining the study of human biology, history, and culture.

horticulture:

a subsistence strategy that relies on rotating use of small gardens cultivated using nonmechanized technology.

household:

a group of people united by kinship or other links who share a residence and organize production, consumption, and distribution among themselves.

Human Relations Area Files (HRAF):

an ethnographic database that includes descriptions of more than 300 cultures and is used for cross-cultural research.

imitative magic:

The belief that imitating an action in a religious ritual will cause the action to happen in the material world.

incest taboos:

prohibitions on sexual relations between relatives.

indigenous peoples:
Members of societies that have occupied a region for a long time and are recognized by other groups as its original (or very ancient) inhabitants.

industrialism:
a system of production dependent on investments in machinery, technology, communication, and information. Industrial agriculture is patterned after manufacturing.

informant (respondent, interlocutor, consultant):
a person from whom an anthropologist gathers data.

informed consent:
the requirement that participants in anthropological studies should understand the ways in which their participation and the release of the research data are likely to affect them.

inheritance:
the transfer of property between generations.

innovation:
a new object, way of thinking, or way of behaving that is qualitatively different from existing forms.

institutional review board (IRB):
a committee organized by a university or other research institution that approves, monitors, and reviews all research that involves human subjects.

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):
a system of writing designed to represent all the sounds used in the different languages of the world.

intersectionality:
The overlapping nature of social categories such as race, education, wealth, age, and gender.

intersex:
describes people with genitalia or other biological traits that cannot be easily classified as male or female, including internal and invisible ones.

joint stock company:
A firm that is managed by a centralized board of directors but owned by its shareholders.

kindred:
a unique kin network made up of all the people related to a specific individual in a bilateral kinship system.

kinesics:
the study of body position, movement, facial expressions, and gaze.

kinship:
a culturally defined relationship established on the basis of blood ties or formed through marriage.

kinship system:
the totality of kin relations, kin groups, and terms for classifying kin in a society.

kinship terminology:
the words used to identify different categories of kin in a particular culture.

kula trade:
a reciprocal pattern of exchange among trading partners in the South Pacific islands.

leadership:
the ability to direct an enterprise or action.

ledger drawings:

leveling mechanism:
a practice, value, or form of social organization that evens out wealth within a society.

levirate:
the custom whereby a man marries the widow of a deceased brother.

lexicon:
the total stock of words in a language.

life chances:
the opportunities that people have to fulfill their potential in society.

liminal:
Objects, places, people, and statuses that are understood as existing in an indeterminate state between clear-cut categories.

lineage:
a group of kin whose members trace descent from a known common ancestor.

lineal kin:
kin related in a single unbroken line, such as grandfather–father–son.

linguistic anthropology:
the branch of anthropology concerned with understanding language and its relation to culture.

magic:
An attempt to mechanistically control supernatural forces. The belief that certain words, actions, and states of mind compel the supernatural to behave in predictable ways.

mana:
Religious power or energy that is concentrated in individuals or objects.

manga:
Japanese comic book art.

market exchange:
an economic system in which goods and services are bought and sold at a money price determined primarily by the forces of supply and demand.

marriage:
the customs, rules, and obligations that establish a socially endorsed relationship between adults and children as well as between the kin groups of the married partners.

matrilineage:
a lineage formed by descent in the female line.

matrilineal descent:
a rule that affiliates a person to kin of both sexes through females only.

matrilocal residence:
a system of residence in which a husband lives with or near his wife’s kin after marriage.

mediation:
a form of managing disputes that uses the offices of a third party to achieve voluntary agreement between the disputing parties.

melting pot analogy:
using the analogy, people compared U.S. society to a stew in which all ethnicities were blended to produce an American identity.

messianic:
Focusing on the coming of an individual who will usher in a utopian world.

millenarian:
Focusing on a coming catastrophe that will signal the beginning of

a new age and the eventual establishment of paradise.

modernization theory:
A model of development that predicts nonindustrial societies will move in the social and technological direction of industrialized nations.

monoculture plantations:
Agricultural plantations specializing in the large-scale production of a single crop to be sold on the market.

monogamy:
a rule that limits a person to be married to only one spouse at a time.

monotheistic:
Characterized by belief in a single god.

morphemes:
the smallest units of language that have a meaning.

morphology:
a system for creating words from sounds.

multinational corporation:
A corporation that owns business enterprises or plants in more than one nation.

myths:
Sacred stories or narratives.

nation-state:
a sovereign, geographically based state that identifies itself as having a distinctive national culture and historical experience.

native anthropologists:
anthropologists who do fieldwork in their own culture.

nativistic:

Focusing on the return of society to an earlier time that believers understand as better and more holy than the current era.

negative reciprocity:
exchange conducted for the purpose of material advantage and the desire to get something for nothing.

neolocal residence:
system under which a couple establishes an independent household after marriage.

neopagan:
A member of a new religion that claims descent from pre-Christian nature worship. A modern-day witch.

nomadic pastoralism:
a form of pastoralism in which entire communities and their animals move from place to place during the year.

norms:
shared understandings about the way things ought to be done.

nuclear family:
a family organized around the conjugal tie (the relationship between husband and wife) and consisting of a husband, a wife, and their children.

Orientalism:

parallel cousins:
the children of a parent’s same-sex siblings (mother’s sisters, father’s brothers).

participant observation:
long-term fieldwork that involves gathering data by observing and participating in people’s lives.

pastoralism:

a subsistence strategy that depends on the care of domesticated herd animals.

patrilineage:
a lineage formed by descent in the male line.

patrilineal descent:
a rule that affiliates a person to kin of both sexes through males only.

patrilocal:
a system of residence in which the bride and her children live with her husband’s family after marriage.

patrilocal residence:
system under which a bride lives with her husband’s family after marriage.

peasants:
rural cultivators who produce for household subsistence but also support nonagricultural members’ large complex state societies.

phoneme:
the smallest significant unit of sound in a language. A phonemic system is the sound system of a language.

phones:
the sounds made by humans and used in any language.

phonology:
the sound system of a language.

pidgin:
a language of contact and trade composed of features of the original languages of two or more societies. (Compare with creole.)

Pillage:
To strip an area of money, goods, or raw materials through the

threat or use of physical violence.

plasticity (cultural):
the ability to change behavior in response to a range of environmental demands.

platform capitalism:
a business model in which companies provide websites (platforms) that connect freelance workers and consumers while acknowledging only minimal responsibility to either group.

political ideology:
the shared beliefs and values that legitimize the distribution and use of power in a particular society.

political organization:
the patterned ways in which power is used in a society.

polyandry:
a rule permitting a woman to have more than one husband at a time.

polygamy:
a rule allowing more than one spouse.

polygyny:
a rule permitting a man to have more than one wife at a time.

polytheistic:
Characterized by belief in many gods.

postmodernists:
adherents of a theoretical perspective focusing on issues of power and voice. Postmodernists suggest that anthropological accounts are partial truths reflecting the background, training, and social position of their authors.

potlatch:

a form of redistribution involving competitive feasting practiced among Northwest Coast Native Americans.

power:

the ability to compel other individuals to do things that they would not choose to do of their own accord.

prayer:

Any communication between people and spirits or gods in which people praise, plead, or request without assurance of results.

priest:

One who is formally elected or appointed to a full-time religious office.

private/public dichotomy:

A gender system in which women’s status is lowered by their almost exclusive cultural identification with the home and children, whereas men are identified with public, prestigious, economic, and political roles.

productive resources:

material goods, natural resources, or information used to create other goods or information.

productivity:

the ability of humans to combine words and sounds into new meaningful utterances.

proxemics:

the study of the cultural use of interpersonal space.

race:

the term *race* is used to classify people based on perceived physical differences that are believed to imply a wide variety of hereditary differences.

racism:

beliefs, actions, and patterns of social organization that exclude individuals and groups from the equal exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms based on perceived biological differences.

rank society:
a society characterized by institutionalized differences in prestige but no important restrictions on access to basic resources.

rebellion:
the attempt of a group within society to force a redistribution of resources and power.

reciprocity:
a mutual give-and-take among people of equal status.

redistribution:
exchange in which goods are collected and then distributed to members of a group.

religion:
A social institution characterized by sacred stories; symbols and symbolism; the proposed existence of immeasurable beings, powers, states, places, and qualities; rituals and means of addressing the supernatural; specific practitioners; and change.

revolution:
an attempt to overthrow an existing form of political organization and put another type of political structure in its place.

rite of passage:
A ritual that marks a person’s transition from one status to another.

rites of intensification:
Rituals structured to reinforce the values and norms of a community and to strengthen group identity.

ritual:
A patterned act that involves the manipulation of religious symbols.

sacred narratives:

Stories held to be holy and true by members of a religious tradition.

sacrifice:

An offering made to increase the efficacy of a prayer or the religious purity of an individual.

Sapir–Whorf hypothesis:

the hypothesis that perceptions and understandings of time, space, and matter are conditioned by the structure of a language.

segmentary lineage system:

a form of sociopolitical organization in which multiple descent groups (usually patrilineages) form at different levels and function in different contexts.

semiotics:

the study of the role of signs and symbols in communication and meaning.

sex:

The biological difference between male and female.

sexuality:

Sexuality refers to sexual desire. Sexual desire may vary depending on age, social conditions, and other factors. Whether people are inclined to be attracted to members of their own or the other sex seems to be biologically determined. However, whether they express that attraction and how they do so is molded by culture.

shaman:

An individual who is socially recognized as having the ability to mediate between the world of humanity and the world of gods or spirits but who is not a recognized official of any religious organization.

sign:

anything that can be used to communicate meaning.

social mobility:
movement from one social stratum to another.

social stratification:
a social hierarchy resulting from the relatively permanent unequal distribution of goods and services in a society.

society:
a group of people persisting through time and the social relationships among these people—their statuses and roles.

sociolinguistics:
a specialization within anthropological linguistics that focuses on speech performance.

sorcery:
The conscious and intentional use of magic.

sororal polygyny:
a form of polygyny in which a husband marries more multiple women who are sisters to each other.

sororate:
the custom whereby when a man’s wife dies, her sister is given to him as a wife.

speech community:
a group of people who share a set of norms and rules for the use of language.

Standard Spoken American English (SSAE):
the version of English used in professional communication in the United States and taught in most schools there.

state:
a hierarchical, centralized form of political organization in which a

central government has a legal monopoly over the use of force.

stratified society:
a society characterized by formal, permanent social and economic inequality in which some people are denied access to basic resources.

structural adjustment:
A development policy promoted by Western nations, particularly the United States, that requires poor nations to pursue free-market reforms to get new loans from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

subculture:
a group within society whose members share norms and values significantly different from those of the dominant culture.

subsistence strategies:
the way a society transforms environmental resources into food.

succession:
the transfer of office or social position between generations.

Sweatshops:
Generally, a pejorative term for factories with working conditions that may include low wages, long hours, inadequate ventilation, and/or physical, mental, or sexual abuse.

swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivation:
a form of horticulture in which fields are cleared by felling vegetation and burning vegetation.

symbol:
something that stands for something else.

syncretism:
The merging of elements of two or more religious traditions to produce a new religion.

syntax:

the part of grammar that has to do with the arrangement of words to form phrases and sentences.

Tirailleurs Sénégalais:

A regiment of Senegalese riflemen that existed from 1857 to 1960. It was composed largely of soldiers from French West African colonies led by officers from Metropolitan France.

totem:

An animal, plant, or other aspect of the natural world held to be ancestral or to have other intimate relationships with members of a group.

totemism:

Religious practices centered on animals, plants, or other aspects of the natural world held to be ancestral or to have other intimate relationships with members of a group.

transculturation:

the transformation of adopted cultural traits, resulting in new cultural forms.

transhumant pastoralism:

a form of pastoralism in which people have permanent homes and part of the society, usually men and boys, moves seasonally with their animals.

transmigrant:

immigrants who maintain close relations with their home countries.

transnationalism:

the pattern of close ties and frequent visits by immigrants to their home countries.

tribe:

a culturally distinct population whose members consider themselves descended from the same ancestor.

trickster:
A supernatural entity that does not act in the best interests of humans.

two-spirit:
An alternative gender role in native North America (formerly called berdache).

unilineal descent:
descent group membership based on links through either the maternal or the paternal line, but not both.

universal grammar:
a basic set of principles, conditions, and rules that underlie all languages.

values:
culturally defined ideas of what is true, right, and beautiful.

vision quest:
A practice common among many Native American groups in which individuals seek to achieve direct contact with the supernatural.

vitalistic:
Looking toward the creation of a utopian future that does not resemble a past golden age.

wealth:
the accumulation of material resources or access to the means of producing these resources.

Wiccan:
A member of a new religion that claims descent from pre-Christian nature worship. A modern-day witch.

witchcraft:
The ability to harm others by harboring malevolent thoughts about them; the practice of sorcery.

Word:

the smallest part of a sentence that can be said alone and still retain its meaning.

world art:

World Bank:

Officially called the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, an international agency that provides technical assistance and loans to promote international trade and economic development, especially to poor nations. The World Bank has often been criticized for interfering in the affairs of these nations.

world music:

World music incorporates different musical styles from cultures throughout the world.

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